

**Irish Migrant Identity in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 1815 - 1845**

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**Ph. D. Thesis  
Department of History  
University of Edinburgh  
2001**

## Abstract

This thesis is a study of Irish immigrants in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the period 1815 to 1845. It examines the experience of these migrants in order to discover who they were, where they came from, to what extent their pre-migration experience was reflected in their lives in their new homes and whether or not they possessed an awareness of themselves as a community. Research has involved extensive use of convict transportation and court records, local newspapers, colonial and home office records and folklore material.

Documentary evidence on the Irish diaspora for the first half of the nineteenth-century is scarce and as a result historical literature tends to focus on the second half of the century. As a consequence of the limited availability of historical evidence, the literature which does exist for the earlier period has relied too heavily on conclusions reached about Famine migrants and on negative images with less specific origins. This thesis uses records of transportation which provide full and reliable data on age, birthplace, occupations, marital and family status, literacy and religion, to provide a new and vivid profile of the Irish in Britain. The conclusions drawn from this data challenge many previous assumptions and are presented in Chapter One.

Chapters Two and Three consider the way in which the Irish saw themselves and were seen by the English. The existing literature concentrates almost exclusively on English attitudes towards the Irish, thus confirming the strength of the anti-Irish stereotype in denying the Irish their prejudices. It is argued here that identities are mutually constituting and that both parties played an important creative role in the self image of the other. Relations between Irish immigrants and their English hosts could not but be affected by their long history of opposition and mutual misrepresentation.

Chapters Four to Six focus on the ways in which Irish identity manifested itself in Yorkshire and Lancashire, that is, in politics, in their secret societies and in religion. Chapter Four demonstrates the commitment of large numbers of Irish immigrants to the interests of their native home and the way in which they remained under the influence of political leaders such as Daniel O'Connell. Chapter Five shows the way in which the introduction of Ribbon Societies to Britain helped to maintain and reinforce ethnic identity. Finally Chapter Six argues that the Irish, far from being indifferent to matters of religion, had very particular ideas regarding the organisation of their Church and were adept at asserting their opinions.

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### Acknowledgements

My first debt of gratitude is to my supervisor Dr Ian Duffield whose untiring enthusiasm and energy have been an inspiration. He has never lost patience with me despite my many empty promises. His record as a supervisor speaks for itself as an abundance of scholarly work has been produced under his guidance.

Professor Bob Morris as my second supervisor has always provided an open door and a listening ear. The fact that the door has a picture of Leeds Town Hall posted to it made it seem even more welcoming to a fellow Leodean. More than anyone else Bob helped me to formulate the questions I needed to ask of my material and I thank him sincerely for that.

I am eternally grateful to my friend and advisor Mr Eugene O'Sullivan. He has read and commented upon drafts of this thesis and has always given generously of his time and glorious anecdotes. Despite his undisguised amusement at my various gaffs, pomposities and inelegant phrasings it has been a joy to be associated with him and I am delighted to be able to call him my friend.

My greatest debt is to Dr Paul Nugent who has provided immeasurable support. He calmed me during my numerous attacks of self doubt, read and commented on endless drafts of this thesis and advised me with the wisdom of one who has travelled the same road. He has been an endlessly patient sounding board and his impeccable manners have precluded him from displaying even a hint of boredom at my ramblings.

I thank Dr Paul Bailey and Dr Crispin Bates whose undergraduate course in South and East Asian history threw open the non European world and provided fascinating comparative insights. I would also like to thank Dr Tom Dunne who was an inspiring teacher during my year as an Erasmus student in Cork and who also advised me during my postgraduate studies. Dr John Belchem was also very enthusiastic and helpful with my research.

I am grateful to the British Academy which provided me with a three year studentship. I am also indebted to the Carnegie Trust who awarded me travel grants to conduct research in London and Dublin.

I would like to thank the staff of the National Libraries of Scotland and Ireland as well as those of the Public Record Office in Kew. Thanks are also due to Robert Finnigan, of the Leeds Diocesan Archives who provided me with tea and biscuits as well as manuscripts.

My days as a postgraduate student in Edinburgh were enhanced by the company of my fellow doctoral students and I take this opportunity to thank Stephen Bowd, Pete Lamont, Kirsty Reid, Mog Grenby, Jenny Lister, Henry Knox, Tina Picton Phillipps, Tamsin O'Connor, Clare Anderson and Jim Mills.

I would particularly like to thank my family and friends who have provided encouragement, nourishment and necessary blasts of scepticism. I owe a great debt to those who put me up and put up with me especially William and Noeleen Garrett (whose move from London to Dublin landed them with a double dose of me), Sylvia and Betty Doyle, Pip and Gareth Austin and the culinary challenged Dominic Nelson. I am indebted to Fr Eamonn O'Gorman who arrived like the cavalry to assist in formatting, document retrieval and printing. Margaret Langstaff deserves a special mention for her endless capacity to harry and harass which I'm sure - and she is certain - has been a large factor in my completing the thesis. Richard and Carmel Langstaff deserve credit for bearing the brunt of this when I was far out of earshot. The patience, generosity and love bestowed upon me by my family is such to ensure that any attempt at thanks falls laughably short. My husband, Tom Keating, has for some time now been my chief distraction but is still deserving of thanks for his unfailing confidence in me. The idea of having weekends free to spend with him gave me the greatest incentive to complete.

My grandmother Margaret (Moran) Garrett, who exchanged Mayo for Leeds many years ago without ever losing her sense of Irishness, is the inspiration behind this thesis. Her own education was sadly cut short but she never lost her enthusiasm for learning and instilled in her family the importance of education and a pride in their culture. It is to her that this thesis is dedicated as a small token of love and thanks.

## Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to establish an understanding of the Irish community in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the period 1815 – 1845. The intention is to consider both their prior and post migration experience in order to establish an accurate profile and to determine their level of self-awareness as a community. In undertaking this study I was driven by two main motivations which were closely related to each other. In the first place, I was troubled by the fact that relatively little work had been completed on the first half of the nineteenth-century in the context of Irish migration to Britain. Many studies have been produced which give as their period the nineteenth century but which in fact pertain almost entirely to the second half of the century. A similar situation can be seen in studies of Victorian Britain where the period under investigation is often post 1850 rather than 1837. Examples include The Irish in the Victorian City, an excellent volume by Swift and Gilley containing twelve chapters, only one of which focuses on the Irish in early Victorian Britain.<sup>1</sup> Again The Irish in Britain is focused mainly on the post 1850 period.<sup>2</sup> O'Connor's The Irish in Britain concentrates mostly 'onwards from the 1900s'. Lees does refer heavily to the pre-1850 period in Exiles of Erin but her sample of Irish households is drawn from census schedules for London in 1851 and 1861.<sup>3</sup> David Fitzpatrick's Irish Emigration 1801-1921, despite the broad range promised by the period given in the title has very little to say on the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

The reason for this focus on post-1840 period has to do with the availability of historical documentation. This is a factor which D. H. Akenson has emphasised in his work of synthesis on the Irish diaspora. He comments on the paradox that although Britain has been the second most important reception area for Irish migrants it is the place for which we have the least and lowest quality of information especially systematic data.<sup>5</sup> The first

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<sup>1</sup> G. Swift & S. Gilley, The Irish in the Victorian City, (Croom Helm, London, 1985)

<sup>2</sup> G. Swift & S. Gilley, The Irish in Britain, 1815-1839, (Pinter, London, 1989)

<sup>3</sup> L. H. Lees, Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, Irish Emigration, 1801-1921, Studies in Irish Economic and Social History I, Dublin 1984. Other studies have been more open in their omission of the first half of the century, for example D. Fitzpatrick's Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century, T. Dillon's 'The Irish in Leeds', Thoresby Miscellany, XVI, 1979, C. Holmes' John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971, (MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1988), C. Pooley's 'Residential Segregation of Migrant Communities in Mid Victorian Liverpool', Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series, Vol. 2, (1977) C. Richardson's 'Irish Settlement in Mid Nineteenth Century Bradford', Bradford Antiquary, XLV, (June 1971) S. Fielding's Class & Ethnicity: Irish Catholicism England, 1880-1939, (Open University Press, Buckingham, 1993) W.J. Lowe's The Irish in Mid Victorian Lancashire: the Shaping of a Working Class Community, (P.Lang, New York, 1989)

<sup>5</sup> D. Akenson, The Irish Diaspora: A Primer, (Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast, 1996) p. 190

census to record the 'Irish-born' was in 1841; information on religious affiliation was never collected. Most studies of the Irish in Britain have relied on post 1841 census material which is the reason the present work concentrates on the earlier period.

The second and related motivation behind this work has been to test the reliability of the popular image of the Irish immigrant. O'Day notes that images of 'wretched refugees encrusted in poverty' still cling to the Irish Diaspora:

'Popular memory also records other usually less flattering visions. The Irish are often portrayed as given to excess of drink and crime, as corrupt political fixers, as strike breakers, as superstitious and pious and as the witless but good humoured stage Paddy.'<sup>6</sup>

In more recent work, attention has been given to the 'pull' factors in Irish migration, thus recognising more to the decision making process than a simple kneejerk reaction to worsening economic circumstances.<sup>7</sup> This thesis will uncover new evidence relating to the experience of Irish migrants in this period by utilising evidence relating to crime, more particularly records of transportation. The details of every Irishman and woman sentenced to transportation in Yorkshire and Lancashire whose sentence was carried out and who was sent to New South Wales, were collected from the indents of ships arriving in Sydney between 1815 and 1840, giving a total of 560 persons.<sup>9</sup> These indents give valuable information on the birthplaces, ages, literacy, occupations, religion, physical appearance and family structures of the named individuals as well as details of crime and sentence. Where possible, further qualitative evidence has been linked to the individual convicts from court reports, prison calendars and petitions, to establish a more comprehensive picture.<sup>10</sup> Two further samples were drawn from the indents for comparative purposes, that is, one in ten English men and women sentenced to transportation in Yorkshire and Lancashire and a similar sample of Irish men and women sentenced in Ireland.

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<sup>6</sup> O'Day, A., 'Revising the Diaspora', in D. George Boyce & A. O'Day, *The Making of Modern Irish History Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, (Routledge, London, 1996) pg. 188

<sup>7</sup> See D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, L. H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, D. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922*, (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999) MacRaild's study is one of the few which does investigate the first half of the nineteenth century without relying on overworked clichés regarding Irish migration.

<sup>9</sup> Authority of New South Wales, *Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849*, Balgowlah, N.S.W. : W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 microfilms.

<sup>10</sup> Court reports were found in local newspapers, prison calendars in the local archives at Preston and Wakefield. Petitions are held in the Public Record Office at Kew (HO. 17)

A profile of the Irish working class community based upon criminal evidence might be criticised as skewed. To counter such accusations, it is necessary to place this research within the context of the recent historiography of crime and transportation. The silence of shame and disdain for convict origins which typified Australian feeling for many decades, was broken by sympathetic historians at the beginning of the century, the most influential being George Arnold Wood.<sup>11</sup> Influenced by the research of the Webbs and Hammonds into village labourers, welfare and trade unionism, Wood presented the convicts as innocent 'village Hampdens' and political rebels who were victims of the class-biased legal system which was the real villain of the piece.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation was in turn questioned by a new generation of historians in the 1950s and 1960s, notably Manning Clark, Lloyd Robson and A.G.L. Shaw, of whom the former two used quantitative methods to interpret statistical data collected from the convict indents.<sup>13</sup> These historians were heavily influenced by the writings of Henry Mayhew and Patrick Colquhoun, who had been preoccupied with the existence of a distinct criminal class, which displayed common mental and behavioral characteristics, had an inbred aversion to work and lived largely or entirely on the profits of their crime.<sup>14</sup> Colquhoun claimed that 1/8 of the population of London in 1790, that is 115,000 people, were "regularly engaged in criminal pursuits".<sup>15</sup> Mayhew, a journalist, distinguished between the professional criminal and the criminal who broke the law for some accidental cause, but argued that the former group made up more than 82% of the total. Crime was believed to be hereditary and encouraged by the love of ease rather than being the result of need. Thus Clark concluded that "the evidence shows quite clearly that the convicts in the main were recruited from the criminal classes of Great Britain and Ireland" and Robson concluded that:

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<sup>11</sup> G. A. Wood, 'Convicts', *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal & Proceedings*, Vol 8, 1922.

<sup>12</sup> See S. & B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (Longmans, London, 1894) and J. L. & B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832: A Study in the government of England before the Reform Bill* (Longmans Green, London, N. Y., 1911), *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832: the New Civilisation* (Longmans Green, London, 1917), *The Skilled Labourer, 1760-1832* (Longmans Green, London, 1919).

<sup>13</sup> C. M. H. Clark, 'The Origins of the Convicts Transported to Eastern Australia, 1787-1852', parts 1 & 2, *Historical Studies*, Volume 7, Nos 26-27 (May, November 1956),  
L. L. Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia: An Enquiry into the origin and Character of the Convicts Transported to New South Wales and Van Diemens Land 1787-1852*, (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1965). A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain & Ireland to Australia and other parts of the British Empire*, (Faber & Faber, London, 1966)

<sup>14</sup> See P. Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (London, 1797), & H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: a Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work. Those Who Cannot Work and Those Who Will Not Work*, (16 Upper Wellington Street, Strand, London, 1861).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Victor Gollancz, 1963, London, Penguin, London, 1988, pg. 59)



"the convicts were neither simply village Hampdens nor merely ne'er-do-wells from the city slums but if the Hampdens are placed at one side of the scale and the ne'er-do-wells on the other side the scale must tip towards the ne'er-do-wells."<sup>16</sup>

This concept of the criminal class was revisited by the publication in 1988 of Convict Workers. Rather than dismissing convicts as 'human serpents' Nicholas and Shergold assess them as 'human capital'. Using the largest sample yet of 19,111 convicts collected from the indents Convict Workers analysed six measures of human capital namely age, sex, literacy, occupation, height and deformities. This data was tested against a sample of the working class who remained at home, drawn from the 1841 census and the authors concluded that:

"... the convicts transported to Australia were ordinary British and Irishmen and women. They were not professional and habitual criminals recruited from a distinct class and trained to crime from the cradle...not only were those transported to New South Wales not part of a criminal class, the fact is that there existed no such class in Victorian Britain from which to select the transportees."<sup>17</sup>

This work has been supported by more recent body of research undertaken by Maxwell Stewart, Reid and Oxley.<sup>18</sup>

Questions have been raised as to the reliability of the occupational and literacy data taken from the indents. Critics of Nicholas and Shergold have suggested that many of the convicts may have lied about their skills in order to improve their employment opportunities in the colony, or because, as criminals, they were habitual liars. Several tests have been applied, however, such as comparing the data, where possible, with information found in court reports. Even without such tests, however, it would seem unlikely that the convicts would have lied in a systematic fashion about their occupational experience. The detailed and varied nature of the information given by them, often listing multiple skills with no necessity, tends to confirm the broad reliability of the data. The occupational information was used to compile appropriation lists and to determine work assignments and therefore

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<sup>16</sup> C. M. H. Clark, *ibid.* pg. 125. L. L. Robson, Convict Settlers, pg. 157-158.

<sup>17</sup> S. Nicholas & P. R. Shergold, (eds), Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & Melbourne, 1988), pg. 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> H. Maxwell Stewart, 'The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemens Land, 1803-1846', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990. K. Reid, 'Work, Sexuality and Resistance: The Convict Women of Van Diemens Land, 1820-39', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1996. D. Oxley, Convict Maids (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & Melbourne, 1996)

the fact that the authorities continued to collect it, suggests that they were satisfied with its broad accuracy and therefore utility.

The rejection of the criminal class thesis by increasing numbers of historians since 1988, has been supported by a body of material produced in the last twenty years by social historians working on crime in nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>19</sup> These historians agree that most convicted criminals were ordinary members of the working class who, for the most part, slipped in and out of crime according to their economic position. David Philips in his study of crime in the Black Country during the nineteenth century concludes that:

"...the great majority of offences seem to have been committed by people who were not full time criminals, who worked at jobs normally but also stole articles on some occasions or became involved in a fight or robbery. What is noticeable is the casualness or lack of planning in these instances."<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, George Rudé's research into crime in the south of England in the early part of the century concludes that even in London the case for the existence of a definable 'criminal class' has not been made:

There were no doubt a minority of hardened criminals and isolated gangs of 'professionals' and perhaps even more 'professionals' working on their own account but properly speaking they were not sufficient in numbers to constitute a criminal class."<sup>21</sup>

Having determined, therefore, that the Irish found among the ranks of the transportees to New South Wales were representative of the ordinary working class, Chapter One concentrates on the sample and examines their patterns of residence, birthplace and migrant experience, literacy, age and family structures and occupations. The sample of the Irish in Britain is compared to a sample of the host population and one of the Irish in their native country. The evidence drawn from the indents is then supplemented by qualitative material

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<sup>19</sup> D. Philips, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England*, (Croom Helm, London, 1977), D. Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (Routledge & Kegan, London, 1982), G. Rudé, *Criminal and Victim: Crime and Society in Early Nineteenth Century England*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985), C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, (Longman, London, 1987), Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1991), V. A. G. Gattrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994)

<sup>20</sup> D. Philips, *Crime and Authority*, p. 287.

<sup>21</sup> G. Rudé, *Criminal and Victim*, p. 126.

found in parliamentary papers, newspapers and additional criminal records to provide a fuller picture of the lives of Irish migrants in the new communities in this period.

The second section of the thesis considers the way in which the Irish viewed themselves and were viewed by the English. Less attention has been devoted to Irish ideas of themselves and their rulers than has been given to the existence of English prejudice.<sup>22</sup> In reality, both parties made use of stereotypes, as indeed everyone must in order to reduce experience to something intelligible. The difference was, of course, that English representations of the Irish were used within a relation of power, becoming thus a system by which people were manipulated and controlled, in the manner which Said describes in *Orientalism*.<sup>23</sup> Stereotypes become dangerous and damaging when they are used to serve interests which rationalise, ideologise and thus justify exploitative intergroup relations which serve the goals, needs and values of the perceiver's group. As the stereotype suggested the possibility of knowledge and understanding it became an essential weapon in the colonial arsenal.

Chapter Two demonstrates that the limitations of English rule in Ireland and its questionable legitimacy demanded the creation of a native who was at once redeemable and irredeemable. Having gone through this creative process the English had difficulty in recognising any other truth. It is necessary to examine this process in order to understand the experience of Irish migrants in England.

Representations of the colonised are often more enlightening in terms of the self-image of the colonised than Said has considered. Negative aspects of the Irish stereotype expose the values and virtues which the English held dear, as well as betraying their insecurities. English opinion of the Irish had a great influence on the way in which the Irish saw and represented themselves. The English valued 'English' traits over 'Irish' traits which the Irish then devoted time and energy into refuting. Identity can thus be seen as a dialogue with each party claiming superiority and denying the claims of the other. Identities, therefore, are mutually constituting, involving a process of exchange in which the protagonists become inextricably entangled.

Chapter Three acknowledges the importance of regional differences and antipathies amongst the Irish but explores the 'general sense of recognition' with which they regarded

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<sup>22</sup> For example: L. P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D. C. 1971, *Anglo-Saxons & Celts: A Study of Anglo-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*, New York University Press, Bridgeport, Conn. 1968, S. Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in Britain, 1878-1900', in C. Holmes, *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1978) P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994)

<sup>23</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, (Penguin, London, 1978)



each other. Analysis of Irish migrants' religious and political lives in the north of England and of how far their 'Irishness' affected their individual and communal responses, requires a prior picture of their formative experiences in Ireland. It is necessary to examine not only the communities which the Irish met with and constructed for themselves but also those which they left behind. Indeed, it is only by studying the native community that we can hope to understand the behavior of the Irish in their new homes. Chapter Three argues that the Irish came to Britain with pre-formed political inclinations which in turn influenced their communal responses. Although these individuals possessed multiple and often conflicting identities, certain allegiances, such as religious and political affiliations were more powerful than others and this was reinforced by the migration process. In the eighteenth-century the Irish were polarised along religious lines and religious denomination was their defining identity. Insufficient attention however has been given to the biases and pre-conceived opinions of the Irish. Prior to migration, these individuals did not occupy a spiritual and religious vacuum, nor did the Irish Sea induce amnesia. Without doubt early nineteenth century Ireland experienced crippling economic, social and political difficulties which migrants must have been glad to leave behind but their vibrant and lively culture, their deep spiritual allegiances and their strong sense of history were not so readily cast off.

The final section of the thesis considers Irish identity in its everyday manifestations. Chapter Four focuses on the political life of Irish migrants and argues that the Irish came to Britain with pre-formed social and political inclinations, which in turn influenced their actions. Those immigrants who had come to Britain from the mid-1820s had witnessed the political transformation of their native communities under the guidance of O'Connell and the Catholic Association, with the assistance of the priesthood. The Irish community transplanted, remained very much under the influence of their 'uncrowned king', Daniel O'Connell; they saw their interests as synonymous with those of their fellow countrymen in Ireland, rather than with the working classes of Britain, which is understandable if their rhetoric about returning home was to be believed. Far from being a tabula rasa, Irish immigrants, particularly in the larger communities of the northern towns, could, on occasion, be seen as a definite interest group. It will be seen that they were easily mobilised when questions relating to their native land were at issue.

Chapter Five looks at Irish involvement in secret societies, more specifically, the Ribbon movement. These multi-functional organisations were important in reinforcing ethnic bonds in that they were exclusively Irish and Catholic. Ribbon societies fostered association among Irish Catholics across a large geographical area, providing a formal network for migrant members who travelled in search of employment. Ribbon business also demanded

the maintenance of close contacts with Ireland and frequent reciprocal visits for the delegates of both countries. The political nature of much of the documentation relating to Ribbonism also exposes a deep sense of dissatisfaction with English rule in Ireland among those migrants who fell under its influence.

Finally, Chapter Six considers the influence of religion on the lives of the Irish in the communities of northern England. It argues that the English Catholic Church was concerned with the assertiveness of the Irish and their demands for a recognisably Irish organisation of the parish and clergy, thus suggesting a level of sophistication and self-confidence among migrants which has previously gone unnoticed. It focuses on Irish attempts to assert themselves and stamp their own mark on the English Church and English determination to prevent this from happening. This chapter also examines the way in which differences of opinion between Irish and English Catholics contributed to an increasing introversion among the Irish, thus reinforcing their ethnic identity.

## Chapter One

### A Profile of Irish Migrants in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 1815 - 1845

Emigration, as David Fitzpatrick has noted, is one of the great formative factors of modern Irish history.<sup>1</sup> One cannot attempt to understand modern Irish society nor make meaningful historical comment about Ireland, without studying its emigration. Most studies of emigration rely heavily on census material which, though vital, cannot construct an exact profile of the Irish emigrant. The United Kingdom census, for example, only began recording place of birth in 1841 and even then only the country of birth, thus concealing regional distinctions. The evidence provided by transportation records and supplemented by newspaper reports is more precise and offers rich insights into the Irish community in the north of England.

Irish migration was not solely a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Irish scholars and clerics had traveled to the Continent centuries before and political exile was a familiar practice.<sup>2</sup> During the eighteenth-century, movement across the Atlantic increased, particularly from the northern counties. This pattern was restricted during the French wars but resumed again after 1815. Seasonal migration was a common occurrence with workers leaving their homes each Spring for agricultural and construction work within Ireland or abroad and returning in the Autumn, with enough savings to pay the rent. From the early nineteenth-century, migrants had travelled from south Leinster and east Munster as far as the Newfoundland fisheries.<sup>3</sup> In the three decades after 1815, however, emigration became endemic with over one million migrants leaving to join the labour markets of Britain and the United States of America.<sup>4</sup>

The great propensity of the Irish to move has been traditionally explained as a consequence of the growing economic crisis in Ireland. In 1821 the density of population in Ireland was greater than that of any other European country.<sup>5</sup> Two or three million people formed the cottier, or landless labourer class, in 1815. Their position was made even more vulnerable in the absence of a Poor Law.<sup>6</sup> The oversupply of labour in Ireland depressed wages. Unemployment or underemployment presented a constant threat. Rents were high and cottage tenures were held only from year to year, the occupier having no legal claim to

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<sup>1</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration 1801-1921*, (Studies in Irish Economic and Social History) I, (Dublin 1984)

<sup>2</sup> See K. Miller et al. 'Emigrants and Exiles: Irish Culture and Irish Emigration to the New World, 1790-1922', *Irish Historical Studies*, XXII, No. 86, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> K. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1985), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> See W. F. Adams, *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World, 1815 to the Famine*, (Russell & Russell, New York, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> A Poor Law was not introduced into Ireland until 1838.

retain his holding even if he paid his rent. There was, therefore, little incentive to improve the land and every reason to exploit it to its maximum short-term potential and beyond.

A populous class of farmers stood between the cottiers and the gentry and it was from this group that most of the emigrants to America in the early nineteenth-century came. The great majority of this group, holding thirty acres or less, were hardly distinguishable from the cottiers in their lack of capital. The Rundale system of sharing good and bad land was still prevalent in some areas, impeding innovation and higher productivity. The situation in Ulster was slightly better in that custom favoured improvement and frowned upon subdivision.

The absenteeism of a large proportion of the landlord class was seen as one of Ireland's gravest problems. The money obtained from rents in Ireland would be spent in London thus depriving the country of much needed investment. With the fall in the price of grain and the resulting difficulties in collecting rents after 1815, many landlords took the opportunity given at the expiration of a lease to consolidate their holdings and evict tenants.<sup>7</sup> This was encouraged by the growing profitability of pasturage over tillage, which required larger farms and less labour and consequently fewer tenants. In addition the removal of the forty shilling freehold in 1829, meant that landlords no longer had a political incentive to keep peasants on the land as compliant vassals whose votes could be taken for granted or, if necessary, acquired by coercion.

With regard to the economy, however, it is necessary to recognise the importance of regional variations. Lynn Lees has remarked that, by 1800, two economies existed in Ireland: a modernising sector in the north and east, and a highly traditional one in the south west and west.<sup>8</sup> Farms in Leinster were generally larger and benefitted from good transportation networks. In Ulster, farms tended to be smaller and domestic textile production provided a complementary occupation to farming. The linen industry was largely concentrated in Ulster. Incipient Irish industry was smothered, however, by the flood of imports from its larger, rapidly industrialising neighbour, particularly after the removal of protection in the 1820s and 1830s. Many workers moved internally to centres of population like Belfast and Dublin in search of work, but those who could not be absorbed were forced to look across the water.

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<sup>7</sup> G. Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland Before the Famine, 1798-1848*, (Gill & MacMillan, Dublin, 1972), pp. 135-7

<sup>8</sup> L. H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1979) p. 25.

The traditional explanation of the high level of migration from Ireland which stresses 'push' factors, has been qualified by a new generation of Irish historians who emphasise instead on 'pull' factors. As Fitzpatrick has said "push and pull are prerequisite to every decision leading to emigration."<sup>9</sup> The emigrants, according to Lynn Lees, were those who had "the resources, the will, the information and the aspiration to move" and she states further:

"A decision to leave Ireland was made on the basis of knowledge of the outside world, interest in it, and ease of entry into it."<sup>10</sup>

Worsening conditions at home after the Napoleonic Wars, and a growing perception that the situation was better elsewhere, combined to make emigration an attractive option for many. The selection of destination was limited, however, by resources. The Transatlantic pull was weak before the Famine, except among the relatively more prosperous. The low cost of travel between Britain and Ireland and thence between Britain and America, however, encouraged a stepping stone pattern of migration throughout much of the century, with migrants working in Britain and investing their savings in a subsequent transatlantic passage. Another factor facilitating the overseas pull, was the improvement in transportation, manifested by roads and canals but more particularly in the first regular steamboat service which began operating between Britain and Ireland in 1816. By 1821, regular services offering low cost passages were in operation between Belfast, Greenock, and Liverpool creating a 'floating bridge' over the Irish Sea.<sup>11</sup> Commercial rivalry kept deck fares low, ranging from around 2s 6d to 12s 6d.

The choice of destination depended largely on informed comparisons of the material attractions of different societies. An awareness of opportunities available in the wider world was spreading in the early nineteenth century. Seasonal migrants acted as receptors and disseminators of information regarding employment. In addition many Irishmen had served in the British army during the Napoleonic Wars and had learnt more of the work opportunities available in the British labour market. The development of the national school system in the 1830s and the spread of the English language and literacy contributed to this tendency to look outwards. Local newspapers printed announcements of shipping schedules, emigration schemes and advertisements for jobs abroad, including details on the

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<sup>9</sup> R. E. Kennedy, *The Irish : Emigration, Marriage and Fertility*, (Berkeley, L. A., London, 1972); Brenda Collins, 'Proto-Industrialisation and Pre-Famine Emigration', *Social History*, Vol. 7, 1982; D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> L. H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> B. Kerr, 'Irish Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1800-1838', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol 3, (1942-43), p. 370



conditions of work and wage levels. Emigrants' letters, some of which were published, as well as being read aloud to friends and neighbours, also informed the people about opportunities abroad.

Material on the outside world was also distributed in the form of handbills and broadside ballads and in this way Irish workers became increasingly aware that better jobs were available at higher wages outside Ireland. Many migrants made the decision to leave based on the availability of specific jobs, for example, many who had been employed in Ulster's linen industry travelled to the textile towns of Bradford, Halifax, Manchester, Dundee and Arbroath. According to Dillon, many of the Irish in Leeds had come to work in the stuff and plaid trades of the town.<sup>12</sup> The stuff weavers of Leeds explained, that as a consequence of the decline of the woollen trade in Ireland, they were obliged to come to Leeds, 'the emporium of the woollen manufacture in Britain, in order to find employment'.<sup>13</sup> Reverend Francis Murphy explained that his flock of four or five hundred Irish in Bradford came to work as woolcombers or spinners in the factories 'chiefly from County Cork, where the manufacture of woolcombing had declined'.<sup>14</sup> Towns such as Middlesbrough and Barrow drew migrants to work in the iron and steel industries. Migrants sent word to friends and family and thereby fuelled a pattern of chain migration. This is presumably why a large number of migrants from Castlereagh, County Roscommon, could be found among the Irish population of Stafford.<sup>15</sup> As for the Irish in Manchester they busied themselves with 'providing a social network of information on job prospects for family and friends'.<sup>16</sup>

#### PATTERNS OF RESIDENCE

Manchester's Irish community was one of the most famous in terms of contemporary speculation. The district to the north-east of the town, known as New Town or Irishtown, contained a street which had been dubbed 'Irish Row' since 1794. In addition, by 1830, the Irish were to be found concentrated in a district on the south-western side of town, off Oxford Road, known as 'Little Ireland' and in the Ancoats area in the east of the town.<sup>17</sup> These communities received much attention from social commentators such as J. P. Kay,

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<sup>12</sup> T. Dillon, 'The Irish in Leeds', *Thoresby Miscellany*, xvi, (1979) p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19th January 1833.

<sup>14</sup> *The Report of the Royal Commission into the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, P. P. (1836), Vol. xxxiv, Appendix G, pg. 25. (Henceforward Irish Poor 1836).

<sup>15</sup> John Herson, 'Irish Migration and Settlement in Victorian Britain: A Small Town Perspective', in G. Swift & S. Gilley (eds.) *The Irish in Britain*, (Pinter, London, 1989) p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> M. A. Busteed, R. I. Hodgson, & F. Kennedy, 'The Myth and Reality of the Irish Migrant in Mid-Nineteenth Century Manchester: a Preliminary Study', in P. J. O'Sullivan, (ed) *The Irish in the New Communities*, (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1992), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

who published a pamphlet expressing concern for the health and living conditions of cotton workers in 1832.<sup>18</sup> Faucher writing in 1844 again spoke scathingly, as did Engels whose comments are the most familiar:

The race that lives in these ruinous cottages, behind broken windows mended with oilskin, sprung doors and rotten door-posts or in dark, wet cellars, in measureless filth and stench, in this atmosphere penned in as if with a purpose, this race must really have reached the lowest stage of humanity.<sup>19</sup>

Busteed, Hodgson and Kennedy have made a study of a section of Irishtown known as Angel Meadow. Their sample includes those born in Ireland and their offspring living in eighty nine streets, only six of which contained no Irish. Within the core of the subdistrict was a concentration of streets whose residents were 75% Irish. Of this Irish population, 88% were found in Irish houses, suggesting a high level of segregation at household level and leading the authors to conclude that the 'overall impression is of an Irish population segregated from the non-Irish'.<sup>20</sup>

Liverpool's Irish colony was of long standing, Irish names appearing among the town's burgesses as early as 1378.<sup>21</sup> As a mercantile port, Liverpool drew many migrants and the availability of casual work about the docks encouraged many to settle. Other Irish in Liverpool journeyed there as the first step towards America. Migrants were regarded as an indispensable labour supply, who could be drawn on as casual labourers, seasonally, or in emergency. An expansion in Irish migration to Liverpool took place after 1800, as a result of the 1798 Rebellion, and there was a concurrent increase in trade with Ireland. Cornwall-Lewis estimated the Catholic population of Liverpool at 8676 in 1811, and at 24 000 in 1833.<sup>22</sup> The Irish in Liverpool were concentrated in the northern and central dockside or commercial wards. Seven wards had a high population of Irish by 1841, that is: Vauxhall, Exchange, St Paul's, Castle Street, St Peter's, Pitt Street, and Great George where they represented 20% of residents. The Irish made up one third of the population of

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<sup>18</sup> J. P. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacturing in Manchester*, (Manchester, 1832). Reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1969.

<sup>19</sup> M. Leon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects*, (Abel Heywood, Manchester, 1844, Reprinted Frank Cass, 1969). K. Marx & F. Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question: A Collection of Writings*, (Reprinted 1986) p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Busteed et al. 'Myth and Reality of the Irish Migrant in Nineteenth-Century Manchester' p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political & Social History of Liverpool, 1868-1939*, (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1981), p. 7

<sup>22</sup> See J. Papworth, 'The Irish in Liverpool 1835-71: Segregation and Dispersal', unpublished Ph.D thesis, (University of Liverpool, 1982) p. 62.



Exchange ward and perhaps more in Vauxhall, while in Scotland ward 17.3% of the population were Irish. In Castle Street and St Peter's, 24% of the residents were Irish.<sup>23</sup> The Irish settled mostly in older, central areas, close to their places of work, particularly beside the then leading business districts including Dale Street, Park Lane and Whitechapel, within easy access of the docks. Thus, 'the Irish immigrants were chiefly concentrated in the areas of the town centre behind the docks in which many of them were employed and which of course was their precise point of entry.'<sup>24</sup>

<b>(Table 1.1) Irish Born Persons in British Towns &amp; Cities, 1841-71</b>				
<b>Town</b>	<b>Irish Born 1841</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Irish Born 1851</b>	<b>%</b>
London	c. 74 000	3.9	108 548	4.6
Liverpool	49 639	17.3	83 813	22.3
Glasgow	44 345	16.2	59 801	18.2
Manchester	30 304	12.5	52 504	14.3
Dundee	5236	8.5	14 880	18.9
Birmingham	4683	2.6	9341	4
Leeds	5027	3.3	8466	4.9
Ashton	3670	8.1	8090	6.8
Salford	3996	7.5	With	Manch.
Birkenhead	No Data		7300	12.8
Edinburgh	5594	4	12 514	6.5
Preston	1703	3.4	5122	7.4
Newcastle	2857	5.7	7124	8.1
Wigan	1989	7.8	c.3500	10.9
Greenock	4307	11.7	No data	

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> J. H. Treble, The Position of Irish Roman Catholics in the Social Life of the North of England, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, (University of Leeds, 1969) p. 143.

Town	Irish Born 1841	%	Irish Born 1851	%
Stockport	2252	7.9	5701	10.6
Sheffield	1827	2.7	4477	3.3
Cardiff	965	9.6	3317	7.1
Bolton	2185	4.4	4453	7.3

(Source, Papworth,(Thesis, 1982))

A similar pattern of residence can be found in other northern towns where the Irish settled, for example, in Leeds, where 92% of Irish families lived in the north, north-eastern and eastern wards in 1839.<sup>25</sup> Dillon's study of Leeds concentrates on the township 'some three miles long from East to West and one and a half miles from North to South.' This was the most populous of the eleven townships within the borough boundaries and contained eight of the borough's twelve wards. The vast majority of Irish settled in the township rather than the borough, 92.1% living in these eight wards in 1851. In 1841, there were 5027 Irish in Leeds in a settlement on the east end of town, bordered in the west by Vicar Lane, in the south by the river, on the east by a line running from Ellerby Street to York Road, and in the north by the streets adjoining York Road.<sup>26</sup>

The Irish began to arrive in Bradford in the late eighteenth-century and by 1825, marriage and baptismal records indicate a substantial Catholic population. The 1841 census enumerated 1868 Irish, that is 5% of the total population, living in the Bradford township.<sup>27</sup> This, however, excludes those living in the Little Horton district, and a more accurate estimate, therefore, would be around three thousand, concentrated in the four townships of Horton, Bowling, Manningham and Bradford.

Preston was another town particularly attractive to the migrant, due to its low cost housing and job opportunities in the area (the town boasted twenty five mills in 1835). Here again the Irish were highly concentrated in areas such as Hickley.<sup>28</sup> In York in 1841 the Irish numbered 781, or 2.7% of the total population.<sup>29</sup> This was a pre-industrial city, serving the

<sup>25</sup> J. Papworth, 'The Irish in Liverpool 1835-71: Segregation and Dispersal', unpublished Ph.D thesis, (University of Liverpool, 1982) p. 30

<sup>26</sup> T. Dillon, *Irish in Leeds*, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> C. Richardson, 'The Irish in Victorian Bradford' *Bradford Antiquary*, XLV, (June 1971) p. 296.

<sup>28</sup> B. R. Bristow, 'Residential Differentiation in mid-nineteenth century Preston', unpublished Ph.D thesis, (University of Lancaster, 1982) p.87

<sup>29</sup> F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York, 1840-75*, (Cork, Cork University Press, 1982) p. 6

needs of its rural hinterland, although the economy was boosted by the railway carriage and wagon workshops. The Irish here were concentrated in Walmgate, Huntgate and Water Lanes; 21.5% lived in St Margaret's parish and 15.6% in the neighbouring parishes of St George and St Dennis, all in the Walmgate district. More than 15% lived close by in the adjacent Huntgate parishes of St Savior, St Crux, All Saints, Peasholme and St Cuthbert.

Geographical identification was clearly important to Irish migrants and understanding this is crucial to any study of Irish communities in Britain. Residential segregation has nevertheless been the subject of much debate. Questions have been raised concerning the existence of the Irish 'ghetto', which was the concern of contemporaries like Engels, who were anxious about crime and disease. Thompson has denied that the Irish were 'pressed back into the ghetto' by virtue of their common speech and nationality and this subject has been examined at length by a number of local studies undertaken over the last two decades.<sup>30</sup> Despite the evidence of clustering uncovered by this research, however, these authors have been very critical of the idea of the ghetto. It has been attacked on three fronts: firstly, that Irish people could be found outside Irish areas and that clusters had more to do with socio-economic position than anything else; secondly, that the Irish were not a homogeneous group, and thirdly that the Irish were so transient that the very existence of Irish communities must be questioned. The Irish experience had little similarity with the operation of the ghetto in its original sense, that is, as a strictly confined and autonomous community. As immigrants in Britain had access to the institutions of the new communities, the term is not particularly germane or helpful. The question of the existence of Irish ghettos, however, appears to have distracted many scholars into arguments which have obfuscated the real issue of conscious and determined self-segregation. Pooley, for example, argues that:

...the scale of residential segregation needs to be related to the likelihood of intermixing on a daily basis.....there would have been ample opportunity for daily interaction between migrants and the rest of the urban population, especially in small towns like Lancaster. They were not shut off from the outside world in enclosed residential areas.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 480, Busteed et al. *Irish in Nineteenth Century Manchester*, J. Papworth, *Irish in Liverpool*, J. Herson, 'Irish Migration & Settlement', in Swift & Gilley, *The Irish in Britain*.

<sup>31</sup> C. Pooley, 'Segregation or Integration? The residential Experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain', in Swift & Gilley, *The Irish in Britain*, p. 79.

Pooley argues that the term 'ghetto' is inappropriate, but the concern to prove this point underplays the fundamental fact that the Irish generally chose to reside in ethnic clusters. That members of the small Irish middle class were more dispersed throughout these cities, should not obscure the general working-class Irish preference for living together. This tendency is even more apparent at street than at district level; within the Angel Meadow area of Manchester was a core of streets containing 75% Irish residents.<sup>32</sup>

On the question of the homogeneity of the Irish, several witnesses testified to the retention in the new communities of 'absurd enmities which disgraced and degraded them at home' but admitted that 'in a general sense they recognise each other.'<sup>33</sup> Whilst county and provincial identities remained, the experience of living in a foreign and generally unwelcoming country, fostered the growth of a more inclusive Irish identity. The transient nature of Irish immigrants could be seen as damaging to the development of community but it could also have reinforced inward-looking tendencies. Individuals who moved regularly from place to place had great incentives to make and maintain contacts and, therefore, it might be argued that individual Irish communities, such as those mentioned above, were constituents of an Irish national community in Britain.

Irish immigrants generally occupied the worst type of housing in the towns they selected. In Manchester, according to Treble, speculators were committed in the 1820s and 1830s to meeting the housing needs of immigrants.<sup>34</sup> Speculative builders were encouraged by the expansion of the cotton industry, but their priorities were with minimising costs, rather than providing adequate facilities. Building regulations introduced in the 1830s, combined with a steady increase in land prices after 1770, to produce a decline in jerry-building, just at the time when Irish immigration was reaching a peak. In towns such as Liverpool and Leeds, no attempt was made to meet the housing needs of the immigrant community. Most of the accommodation they occupied here was in areas which were being gradually abandoned by the native population:

These people had no choice but to resort to the worst housing in the area in which they settled..that housing had been mainly built before 1815 and for a quite different community.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Busteed et al. *op. cit.* p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Irish Poor* (1836) p. 21

<sup>34</sup> J. H. Treble, *Irish Catholics in the Social Life of the North of England*, p. 141.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.

## BIRTHPLACE AND MIGRANT EXPERIENCE

The indents provide valuable details of the convicts' counties of birth, which the census enumerators did not include in their investigations until 1851. The largest category of convicts, that is 48.32%, were born in Leinster and unsurprisingly Dublin was the most common county of origin, providing 27.9% of the sample. Louth was the next largest provider of migrants within the province supplying 4.68% of the total. These areas were well positioned in terms of communications and transportation with Britain. Ulster was the home province of 31.65% of the sample, with the majority coming from counties Antrim (8.05%), Down (7.68%) and Armagh (6.74%). Connaught was the province of origin of 11.61% of convicts, most coming from Roscommon (3.75%) and Sligo (3%). Only 8.42% of the sample originated in Munster, Cork and Tipperary being the largest providers at 3.37% and 2.06% respectively. The small Munster presence in the north of England can be explained by reference to the typical routes taken by Irish migrants. Ó Tuathaigh notes three main routes: the northern route from Ulster and north Connaught to Scotland; the midland route from Connaught and Leinster to Dublin and thence to northern England and the midlands and finally the southern route from Munster and south Leinster to London, often via Bristol.<sup>36</sup> Obviously many of the convicts in this sample would have moved several times since their first arrival in Britain but the figures, with a large Leinster and small Munster presence, demonstrate the importance of these established routes. The large Ulster presence may have been made up in part by migrants who had entered via Scotland as seasonal workers and decided to stay, seeking more permanent work further afield. Their number is also connected to the transfer of skills from the textile districts of Ulster to equivalent areas in the north of England: 62% of those from Ulster were skilled workers compared with 49.5% of Leinster convicts and 36.4% of those originating in Connaught.

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<sup>36</sup> M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in mid-nineteenth century Britain: Problems of Integration', in G. Swift & S. Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in the Victorian City*, (Croom Helm, London, 1985) p. 152.

<b>(Table 1.2) Birthplaces of Irish Transportees Sentenced in Yorkshire &amp; Lancashire, 1815-1845</b>		
<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Antrim	43	8.05
Armagh	36	6.74
Carlow	4	0.75
Cavan	6	1.12
Clare	4	0.75
Cork	18	3.37
Derry	10	1.87
Donegal	8	1.5
Down	41	7.68
Dublin	149	27.9
Fermanagh	4	0.75
Galway	7	1.31
Kerry	2	0.37
Kildare	14	2.62
Kilkenny	4	0.75
King's County	5	0.94
Leitrim	6	1.12
Limerick	6	1.12
Longford	19	3.56
Louth	25	4.68
Mayo	13	2.43
Meath	10	1.87
Monaghan	12	2.25
Queen's Co.	7	1.31
Roscommon	20	3.75
Sligo	16	3
Tipperary	11	2.06
Tyrone	9	1.69
Waterford	4	0.75
Westmeath	8	1.5
Wexford	11	2.06
Wicklow	2	0.37
Total	534	99.9

(Source: Authority of New South Wales, Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849, Balgowlah, N.S.W. : W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 microfilms)

By comparing the birthplace and place of trial of a sample of convicts tried in Ireland, it is possible to estimate roughly the extent of inter-county mobility. This is only a minimum estimate since any short-term movement, such as seasonal migration, would be missed in the case of those who had resettled in their county of origin by the time they were indicted. 73% of those convicted in Ireland had made no move according to the indents, 16% had moved to a neighbouring county and 11% had traveled from further afield. These figures demonstrate that the Irish were more mobile than the English of whom 81% made no move, 11% moved to a neighbouring county and 8% came from further afield. It would also appear from these figures that mobility and literacy were linked: 77% of the Irish in Ireland,



who moved beyond a neighbouring county possessed literacy skills, whilst the figure for those making no move was only 58%. This supports Mokyr's thesis that Irish migration drained away the cream of the working population.<sup>37</sup>

## LITERACY

The convict indents provide data on literacy; they document the ability to read and write, read only, or to do neither, evidence which can be used as a proxy for general levels of literacy. The material gathered for this study corroborates that produced by Nicholas and Shergold. They found that three quarters of English males transported to New South Wales could either read and write or at least read only.<sup>38</sup> The figure in the present sample of English transportees convicted in Yorkshire and Lancashire is 77.31%, with 23.69% classified as illiterate.

These totals are considerably higher than those for the working population remaining in England; figures for the 1840s indicate that two thirds of the male population in Britain were literate to the extent of signing their names.<sup>39</sup> Among women the figures were slightly lower; 21.1% were illiterate, 57.9% were able to read and 21% could read and write. Thompson notes that the diffusion of literacy in the early part of the century is difficult to assess.<sup>40</sup> Literate individuals were often in the habit of reading newspapers, books and pamphlets aloud to circles of illiterate companions, workmates and family members. Formal education for the British working class fell into three categories: private day schools, Sunday schools and factory schools. The majority of those attending day schools were under ten years old and remained for an average of two to three years.<sup>41</sup> The relatively low cost of these schools (under 6d a week) and the lack of qualifications among the staff, meant that standards were low. Sunday schools were founded in 1780 but the education they provided was obviously limited by their part time nature. Voluntary religious schools began to establish a nationwide network from the 1830s.

Of those men transported from Ireland, 60.24% of the present sample were able to read and write or read only, a figure similar to that of Nicholas and Shergold (62%) and to

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<sup>37</sup> J. Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800 - 1850*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 235.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas & Shergold, *Convict Workers*, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51*, (Fontana Press, London, 1988, First published Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1971) p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> E. P. Thompson, *op. cit.* p. 782.

<sup>41</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *op. cit.* p. 136.

Williams's estimate for convicts tried in Ireland and sent to Van Diemens Land (67%).<sup>42</sup> The data from this study suggests that those convicted in Ireland had an illiteracy rate (around 40%) 17.06% higher than English convicts. 6.53% more English were able to read only, compared to those sent from Ireland and 10.54% more could read and write. Women transported from Ireland were worse off with only 8.8% able to read and write, 41.2% able to read only and 50% incapable of either.

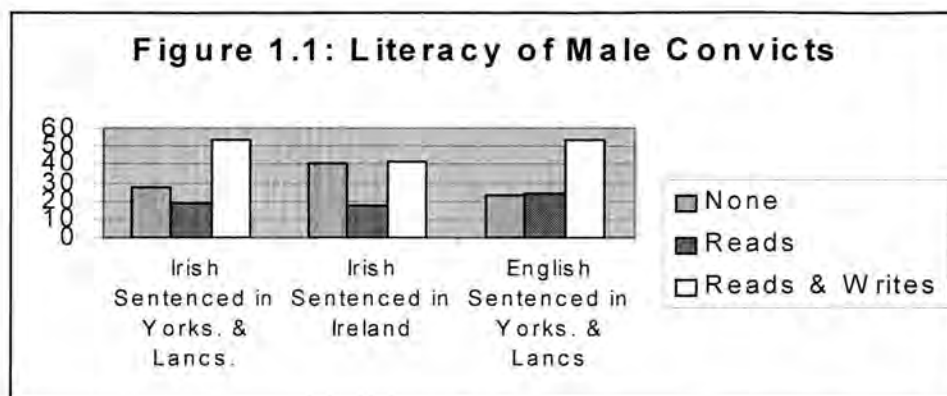
Irish convicts transported from Yorkshire and Lancashire had literacy skills much more similar to those of English convicts. The overall literacy rate for males was 73.2%, 4.11% lower than the English as a whole and 12.96% higher than those convicted in Ireland. The number of those able both to read and write was in fact slightly higher among the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire (54.15%) than among the English convicted in these counties (52.94%). Again, amongst the female Irish convicts sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire, the number able to read and write (26.5%) was higher than among their English peers. Of the remainder 44.1% could read only and 29.4% were illiterate.

<b>(Table 1.3: Literacy of Male Convicts)</b>			
Literacy Level	Irish Convicts Sentenced in Yorkshire & Lancashire	Irish Convicts Sentenced In Ireland	English Convicts Sentenced in Yorkshire & Lancashire
None	27%	40%	23%
Reads	19%	18%	24%
Reads & Writes	54%	42%	53%

(Source: Authority of New South Wales, Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849, Balgowlah, N.S.W. : W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 m. films)

<sup>42</sup> J. Williams, *Ordered to the Island. Irish Convicts and Van Diemens Land*, (Crossing Press, Darlinghurst, N. S. W. 1994), p. 15.





These figures confirm the argument of D. H. Akenson, that education was a major concern for the Irish and not merely the Protestant community.<sup>43</sup> According to the 1861 census, Presbyterians had the highest literacy rate in Ireland, followed by Anglicans with Roman Catholics in third place, and this is borne out by the data in this study. Protestants convicted in Ireland had a literacy rate of 86%, significantly higher than that of Catholics convicted there, who had a literacy rate of 57%.<sup>44</sup> This gap was narrowed, however, during the migration process, since Irish Catholics in Britain had a literacy rate of 71% compared to an Irish Protestant rate of 83%. This may suggest that the Irish migrant population represented the cream of the Irish working population or that they acquired these skills in their new homes. Whatever the explanation, these figures demonstrate that Irish Catholics took educational opportunities when they were available, dispelling to an extent:

"...one of the unexamined clichés of international educational historiography that Protestantism and in particular Scottish Presbyterianism implied a much higher commitment to attainment of literacy and numeracy than did Roman Catholicism."<sup>45</sup>

The higher proportion of Protestants in Ulster was partly responsible for the greater degree of literacy among the Irish, both at home or in Britain, who originated from that province. Among the Irish convicted in Ireland, 69% of those from Ulster had some literacy skills, whilst among those from the same province living in Yorkshire and Lancashire the figure was 81%. This was also connected to the higher degree of urbanisation in the northern region, since the more urbanised province of Leinster also had a higher literacy rate than

<sup>43</sup> D. H. Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants 1815-1922*. (Montreal, McGill Queens University Press, 1988) p. 118.

<sup>44</sup> That is, could read and write or read only.

<sup>45</sup> D. H. Akenson, *op. cit.* p. 118.

Munster and Connaught. Of those born in Leinster and sentenced in Ireland, 63% could read and write or read only, compared to 55% of those born in Munster and 47% from Connaught. Among Irishmen in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 74% of those born in Leinster could read and write or read only, compared with 70% from Munster and 56.5% from Connaught. In every case the literacy levels among the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire were higher than in their birthplace provinces in Ireland.

<b>Table 1.4: Literacy by Province: Irish Convicted in Ireland</b>				
	None	Reads	Reads & Writes	Total
Ulster	31%	26.50%	42.50%	94
Munster	45%	9%	46%	171
Leinster	37%	21.50%	41.50%	245
Connaught	53%	13%	34%	55

<b>Table 1.5: Literacy by Province: Irish Convicted in Yorkshire &amp; Lancashire</b>				
	None	Reads	Reads & Writes	Total
Ulster	18%	24%	57%	87
Munster	29%	25%	46%	24
Leinster	26%	16%	58%	140
Connaught	44%	12%	44%	48

(Source: Authority of New South Wales, Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849, Balgowlah, N.S.W. W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 microfilms)

Access to education was, therefore, more dependent on geographical location and social class than other variables. Indeed the desire for education among the peasantry was of sufficient strength to lead them to disregard legal prohibitions enacted in penal times and as Carleton noted 'the very name and nature of Hedge Schools are proof of this.'<sup>46</sup> 'Hedge schools' were makeshift establishments operated by itinerant schoolmasters and offering a varied and idiosyncratic education for a small fee. These schools were patronised by the peasantry to the extent that 9352 such schools existed in 1829, reaching approximately 400

<sup>46</sup> 'There never was a more unfounded calumny, than that which would impute to the Irish peasantry an indifference to education. I may, on the contrary, fearlessly assert that the lower orders of no country ever manifested such a positive inclination for literary acquirements and that too, under circumstances strongly calculated to produce carelessness and apathy on this particular subject. Nay, I do maintain that he who is intimately acquainted with the character of our countrymen, must acknowledge, that their zeal for book learning, not only is strong and ardent when opportunities of scholastic education occur, but that it increases in proportion as these opportunities are rare and unattainable.' W. Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, (First published in 23 parts, Dublin, W. Curry, 1843-44, Reprinted, Buckinghamshire, Colin Smythe, 1990) Vol. I, p. 271.

000 children.<sup>47</sup> In addition the schoolmaster often organised a night school for the working population:

"Nothing can more decidedly prove the singular and extraordinary thirst for education and general knowledge which characterises the Irish people, than the shifts to which they have often gone in order to gain even a limited portion of instruction. Of this the Irish Night School is a complete illustration. The Night School was always opened, either for those of early age, who from their poverty were forced to earn something for their own support during the day; or to assist their parents; or for grown young men who had never had an opportunity of acquiring an education in their youth, but who now devoted a couple of hours during a winter's night, when they could do nothing else, to the acquisition of reading and writing and sometimes of accounts."<sup>48</sup>

Such were the educational opportunities available to many of the individuals in this sample during their youth in Ireland and their effectiveness can best be judged by the literacy figures above. A state system of education was introduced in 1831, with the naïve intention of providing nondenominational, religiously integrated schooling for all, but this was rather too late for many of this sample. The wide use of English was indicated by the number of printed books sold in shops or by travelling salesmen, estimated at 300 000 in 1818.<sup>49</sup>

Literacy figures taken from the indents are limited in that they only relate to the English language, whereas some Irish would have been literate not only in their native language, but in the classical languages which often formed part of the Hedge School curriculum. Printed books in Irish were rare and scholars, therefore, copied from manuscript versions. The library of the poet Tomas Ruadh Ó Súilleabháin included manuscript versions of Ceitinn's history of Ireland, printed works of the Old and New Testaments, The Life of St Patrick, and The Siege of Troy, material which was all to be commonly found in Hedge Schools. According to Standish O'Grady such works could be read aloud at times when the

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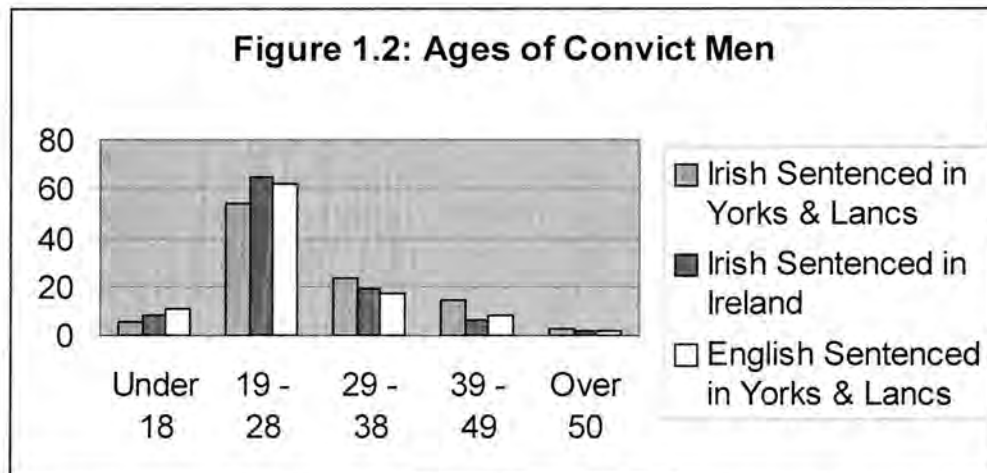
<sup>47</sup> D. G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, (London, Croom Helm, 1982, Routledge, 1995) p. 148.

<sup>48</sup> Carleton, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 285

<sup>49</sup> Dáithí Ó hOgain, 'Folklore And Literature', in D. Dickson & M. Daly (eds.) *The Origins of Popular Literacy: Language Change and Educational Development*, (Dublin, Dept of History, Trinity College Dublin, Dept of Irish History, University College Dublin, 1990) p. 6. These included titles such as The Arabian Nights and Reynard the Fox.

community was gathered together, for example, at woolcarding in the evening or particularly at wakes.<sup>50</sup>

#### AGE AND FAMILY STRUCTURE OF CONVICT SAMPLE MEN



(Source: Authority of New South Wales, Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849, Balgowlah, N.S.W. : W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 microfilms)

The majority of male convicts in all three samples were in the age group 19-29 years, that is, 65% of English convicts, 62% of those convicted in Ireland and 54% of the Irish sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire. The latter group, however, were less well represented in the under 18 category and slightly over-represented in the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups. This may indicate the ages at which Irish migrants arrived in Britain. A large proportion of the under 18s and perhaps a number of those in their early twenties may have been among those who remained in Ireland. The Irish in Britain, therefore, may have been over-represented in the 30-49 age group in proportion to the population. Conversely, the employment opportunities for the older Irish in Britain may have been fewer. Certainly the fear of being removed back to Ireland under the Settlement Acts ruled out any appeal to the Poor Law authorities for many. For some Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire, opportunistic theft may have been a more attractive proposition than destitution where they were, or involuntary removal to Ireland.

The majority of convicts arriving in New South Wales were unmarried, a fact which is unsurprising considering their age structure. Irishmen sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire were more likely to be married (31.1%) than the English sentenced in the same

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3-4

courts (26.2%) or the Irish sentenced in their native home (26.3%). Indeed, the figures are very similar for the latter two groups: 70.8% of convicts sent from Ireland were single and 3% widowed, with 69.7% of English convicts unmarried and 3.9% widowed. Among the Irish sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 65.2% were single and 3.7% were widowed. When marital status is compared with age, the difference in the three samples appears clearly in the 29-49 age group. The proportion of married convicts increases among the Irish transported from Yorkshire and Lancashire, from 55.2% in the under 39 category, to 83.7% in the under 49 category. The proportion among English convicts and among the Irish sent from home, in contrast, increases from 56% to 65.5% and from 51% to 69.2%. A lower rate of widowhood among the Irish sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire is largely responsible for these differences. Only 4.1% of under 49s in this sample had lost their spouse, compared to 13.5% of the Irish sent from Ireland and 17.2% of English male convicts. This could perhaps suggest the migration process involved the stronger and fitter. The majority of men from all three samples had no children, that is, 71% of Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 79.7% of the Irish in Ireland and 78.5% of the English. Among those who did have children, it was unusual to have more than four, only 5.7% of the Irish sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 4.2% of the Irish sentenced in Ireland and 4.7% of the English sample did so.

Female convicts sent from England were much less likely to be married than either of the other groups. 71.1% of the English women in the sample were single in contrast to 48.6% of the Irish sentenced in Ireland and 47.2% of the Irish sent from Yorkshire and Lancashire. In the three samples, Englishwomen were also widowed less (5.3%) than Irish women in Yorkshire and Lancashire (16%) or in Ireland (19.1%). The high proportion of unmarried women in all three samples in turn explains the significant percentage of childless women. 83.8% of English women had no children, whilst the figures for Irish women in Yorkshire and Lancashire and Irish women in Ireland were more similar, at 59.1% and 55.7% respectively. The proportion of single mothers was greatest among the Irish sent from Ireland (10%). 6.9% of single Irish women sent from Yorkshire and Lancashire were accompanied by a child compared with 2.7% of English women.

## OCCUPATIONS

The great majority of emigrants seem to have left without marketable skills...The Irish exodus cannot plausibly be depicted as a movement of redundant artisans, still less a draining away of 'human capital'. Apart from their occupational homogeneity, Irish emigrants were probably as innumerate and illiterate as the populations from which they sprang. Most of those who left were virtually unencumbered by training, expertise or accomplishment.<sup>51</sup>

Such comments are representative of the pessimistic assumptions of most historians regarding the history of Irish migration and the human capital thus exported. The evidence drawn from this sample, however, challenges this opinion and supports instead that of Mokyr, who argued that Irish emigrants represented the 'resourceful, the ingenious, the energetic, the ambitious and the most sophisticated members of the labour force,

Emigration in the nineteenth century involved a considerable risk, a definite postponement of consumption in the present and the immediate future for the sake of higher earnings in the remote future (possibly only enjoyed by another generation), and in any event considerable physical and emotional effort. They were, thus, likely to be persons whose utility functions were different from the rest of the population in three crucial respects: they were less risk-averse, had a lower subjective rate of time preference, and a lower preference for leisure. This is precisely the stuff entrepreneurship is made of.<sup>52</sup>

In categorizing the occupational data this study follows the model of Nicholas & Shergold's *Convict Workers*, using the five skill Armstrong scheme and a second nine skill scheme devised by these scholars to distinguish more clearly between rural and urban workers. Nicholas and Shergold have tested their results against the English and Irish census's of

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<sup>51</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, pp. 8-9. According to Williamson, 'the Irish were generally unskilled and illiterate and therefore had little impact on the skilled labour supply.' J. Williamson, 'The Impact of the Irish on the British Labour Market During the Industrial Revolution', in Swift & Gilley, *The Irish in Britain*, p. 139. Again O'Day states, 'Only a minority left Ireland with capital or economic skills', p. 190

<sup>52</sup> J. Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, (London, George Allen & Unwin) p. 235.



1841 and have found that the skills convicts brought with them to Australia were broadly representative of the skills of the working class in their countries of origin. The five-skill Armstrong scheme was used to separate the samples into professional, middling, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories and these groups were then compared.<sup>53</sup> The number of Irish convicts tried in England included in Armstrong's skilled category (52.2%) compared favourably with the 29.5% of those Irish who remained and 56.6% of their English hosts. 18% of the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire were semi-skilled, compared with 39.4% of the Irish tried in Ireland and 25.8% of English convicts. Amongst the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 26.5% were unskilled, compared with 27.9% of the Irish who remained at home and 16.5% of the English. The Irish, whether at home or in Britain, were to be found in greater numbers among the middling group, at 3.2% and 3.3% respectively, than the English (1.1%) which can be explained by the confusion arising from the definition of the occupation 'farmer' in Ireland.<sup>54</sup>

<b>Table 1:6 Male Skills (Armstrong Scheme)</b>					
	Professional	Middling	Skilled	Semi-skilled	Unskilled
Irish	0.2%	3.3%	52.2%	18%	26.3%
English	0%	1.1%	56.6%	25.8	16.5%
Ireland	0%	3.2%	29.5%	39.4%	27.9%

Nicholas and Shergold drew up an alternative classification to circumvent problems within the Armstrong system. One of these problems is that agricultural labourers are placed in class 4, (semi-skilled) whereas all other labourers are placed in class 5, (unskilled):

‘In consequence, an urban-industrial population is adjudged less skilled and lower in class than a rural agricultural one. The effect biased the convict sample (with its high proportion of urban occupations) downwards towards an unskilled workforce.’<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> W. A. Armstrong, 'The Use of Information About Occupations', in Wrigley & Schofield (eds.) *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, p. 215-23.

<sup>54</sup> As Mokyr has noted 'Both rich and poor were landholders in Ireland and terms like 'farmer' and 'labourer' had become fuzzy.' Mokyr, *op. cit.* p. 17. The fact that farmers are all categorized as middling regardless of scale or property relationship to the land means that the Armstrong scheme tends to underestimate the skill component in the convict sample. Agricultural labourers, for example, are placed in the 'semi-skilled' group, whilst labourers are categorized as 'unskilled'. This means that an urban-industrial population is represented as less skilled than a rural-agricultural one

<sup>55</sup> S. Nicholas & P. Shergold. *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988) P. 71

This classification scheme divides skills into nine categories: unskilled urban, unskilled rural, skilled building, skilled urban, skilled rural, dealers, public services, professional, and domestic service.<sup>56</sup> Within this scheme 53.4% of the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire were in skilled urban jobs compared to 64.14% of the English and 29.17% of the Irish sentenced in Ireland. 24.7% of the Irish in the Yorkshire and Lancashire sample were in unskilled urban occupations compared with 16.8% of the English and 28.8% of the Irish sentenced in Ireland. The Irish sentenced in Ireland were significantly over-represented in the rural unskilled and skilled categories, with the Irish and English in Yorkshire and Lancashire in roughly equal numbers. The Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire were over-represented in the military category at 6.53% compared with 1.96% of the English and 2.3% of the Irish transported from Ireland. Both the Armstrong and Nicholas and Shergold classification schemes, therefore, demonstrate that the majority of Irish convicts sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire were in skilled occupations. The figures suggest that the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire were more skilled than the Irish who remained at home, supporting Mokyr's idea that Irish emigration represented the cream of the population. The figures also make clear that the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire were not so different in terms of skill from their English neighbours and the differences can be partially explained by the constraints facing recent migrants.

<b>Table 1: 7 Male Skills (Nicholas &amp; Shergold Scheme)</b>			
<b>Skill Category</b>	<b>Irish</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Ireland</b>
1. Urban Unskilled	106	60	163
	24.7 %	16.8%	28.8%
2. Rural Unskilled	29	28	116
	6.8%	7.8%	20.5%
3. Skilled Building	40	28	27
	9.3%	7.8%	4.8%
4. Skilled Urban	156	191	109
	36.4%	53.5%	19.3%

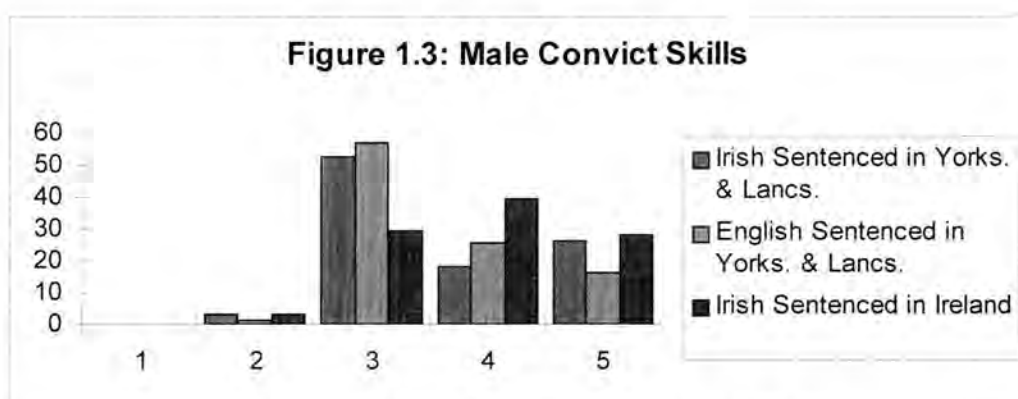
<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71-71



Skill Category	Irish	English	Ireland
5. Skilled	27	25	73
	6.3%	7%	12.9%
6. Dealers	7	4	7
	1.6%	1.1%	1.2%
7. Public Services	28	7	13
	6.5%	2%	2.3%
8. Professional	5	3	9
	1.17%	0.8%	1.6%
9. Domestic Service	31	11	49
	7.2%	3.1%	8.7%

(Source: Authority of New South Wales, Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849, Balgowlah, N.S.W. : W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 microfilms)

Among the Irish transported from Yorkshire and Lancashire who were classified as 'middling', were 6 farmers, 2 cattle dealers, 3 grocers, a publican and a Chandler. Most of the men in the 'skilled' category were tradesmen. The majority of these belonged to the tailoring, (16), shoemaking, (21) and weaving trades, (41). In addition there were 8 plasterers, 2 of whom were also slaters, 5 bakers, 3 butchers, 6 sawyers, 3 fustian cutters, and 6 cotton spinners. Representing the building trade were a stone layer, a stone cutter, 3 bricklayers, 2 millwrights, 3 stonemasons and a stone dresser. The sample included 3 carpenters, a chairmaker, 3 joiners, one of whom was also a cabinet maker, another cabinet maker who had spent seven years at his profession, a ship's carpenter and 3 coopers. Other occupations included 2 chemists, 5 clerks and warehousemen, 2 glass cutters, 2 glassblowers, one of whom had been seven years at that profession and three years as a ropemaker. 18.2% of the men had more than one occupation, a testimony to the instability of the labour market. Charles Jones, a sixty four year old Roscommon man, for example, described himself as an ironmonger, a brewer and a warehouse clerk. Some professions were more unusual; the sample includes a sculptor, a mathematical instrument maker, a Britannia metalsmith, a violin player and an umbrella maker. Other skilled occupations included 18 soldiers, 15 seamen and 3 sailors.



(Armstrong Scheme, Source: Authority of New South Wales, Musters and other papers relating to convict ships, 1790-1849, Balgowlah, N.S.W.: W. & F. Pascoe, [1977] 12 microfilms)

Among the females in the three samples, the Irish settled in Yorkshire and Lancashire were less skilled than the women in both of the other groups. 35.8% of the former group were skilled, compared with 37.9% of those sentenced in Ireland and 44.4% of the English women. Again, in the semi-skilled group, the Irish sentenced in England at 46.8%, fell behind the Irish sentenced in Ireland, at 50%, although in this group the English women had the smallest representation at 25%. The English women were over-represented in the unskilled category (27.8%), compared with the Irish sentenced in Ireland (12.1%), or those sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Women had limited employment opportunities in this period and domestic service, laundrywork, agricultural work and the clothing and shoe trades were predominant. These sectors were also characterised by insecurity and low wages. Among the Irish in Yorkshire and Lancashire, many had worked in domestic service, a sector with particularly poor long term prospects. Laundrywork was one of the given occupations of 27% of the women in the sample. This was often an 'occupation of last resort', undertaken commonly to maintain the family by women whose husbands were out of work. 54.1% of this sample gave multiple occupations, a flexibility which demonstrates the uncertainty inherent in the female labour market.

Much of the evidence used to support the pessimistic view of Irish skill and initiative was drawn from the observations of contemporary observers such as those questioned by the Royal Commission established to investigate the Irish poor in 1836. The Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain concluded that Irish immigration, 'is an example of a less civilised population spreading themselves as a kind of substratum beneath a more

civilised community and without excelling in any branch of industry, obtaining possession of all the lowliest departments of manual labour.'<sup>57</sup>

Unlike its neighbour, Ireland did not enjoy the advantages of raw materials and especially mineral wealth. There were limited coal deposits in Tipperary and Kilkenny but although miners from these regions took their skills to Philadelphia, there were no miners in the present sample. The machine industry was severely restricted because of the lack of iron and practically all other metals. The only industry to which Ireland seemed particularly suited, because of its climate, was linen production. By the mid eighteenth century, 25% of linen cloth imported into Britain came from Ireland.<sup>58</sup> Linen manufacture was concentrated in Ulster. Weaving did take place outside Ulster but was in decline in this period.<sup>59</sup> The sailcloth and canvas producing area of south Cork, for example, received a deathblow with the cessation of hostilities in 1815.

Weaving was a domestic industry. Most large farmers within Ulster were master weavers employing journeymen weavers who generally worked a small area of land in addition, although some artisans lived in. Small farmers in the pre-1815 period were also often master weavers but in the increasingly difficult times following 1815, many of them lacked the capital to purchase their own yarn and bring their webs to market and thus they were gradually transformed into employees.

The greatest capital investment in the industry was concentrated in the four north-eastern counties of Ulster and the areas around the rivers Lagan, Bann and Foyle. The great bleach greens and finest weaving could be found in these areas. This required a large outlay which the average farmer was unable to afford and offered limited returns. Hence wealthy capitalists let out work and provided yarn and looms to employees and began to bring workers into the factory. Master weavers dominated the southern part of Armagh, Louth and Monaghan producing coarse cloth. In more remote areas where communications were more difficult such as north Antrim, West Derry, Tyrone, Cavan and the distant parts of Donegal, men continued to weave the yarn spun by their wives and daughters. Despite the expansion of the linen trade after 1815, small farmers and cottiers did not share the advantage; domestic industry was in decline, exacerbated by the better quality flax being imported from Holland and Russia. The competition of machine-produced cotton cloth decreased the earnings of weavers, except those in areas where cotton factories were

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<sup>57</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. iv.

<sup>58</sup> B. Collins, 'Proto-Industrialisation and Pre-Famine Emigration', *Social History*, Vol. 7, (1982) p. 130.

<sup>59</sup> R. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, (Penguin, London, 1988) P. 321

established, to which they could easily transfer. The removal of the duty on imports to Ireland from Britain was a terrible blow to the domestic linen industry, although in reality it could never have competed effectively with the cheaper materials and machine-made products of England, without wholesale and painful restructuring along similar lines.

The labour market and the rural base of the industry had a significant effect on family structure. Work was labour intensive. Farmers utilised unwaged family labour and therefore needed to prevent their children quitting the household. This in turn led to subdivision. Weaving provided a cash income which reduced reliance on the land and contributed to population increase. The introduction of machinery in Britain brought lower production costs which meant changes in the market for hand spun yarn which had previously provided employment for women and subordinate family members. This damaged the viability of farming/weaving households and added to the youthful emigrant stream of the 1820s and 1830s.

In this way, it can be seen that many pre-Famine migrants moved to areas of textile manufacture, bringing appropriate skills with them. 21% of Ulstermen in the migrant sample were skilled in textile production. Irish immigrants were aware of the superior conditions of work and wages which their skills could achieve for them in Britain:

‘The rate of wages which the Irish obtain in Great Britain is almost invariably higher and in some areas considerably higher than that which they could obtain in their own country. Moreover the employment is more constant so that they are able to work at a higher rate of payment but also able to obtain that payment on a greater number of days in the year.’<sup>60</sup>

The skills of the Irish were also deliberately sought out by British employers on occasion and Irish newspapers and handbills advertised specific work opportunities. English and Scottish millowners used agents in Ireland and often encouraged employees to spread the word to friends and relatives at home.<sup>61</sup> To illustrate, James Oliver, overlooker at Robinson's factory in Dukinfield, explained that at the turn of the century there were few Irish employed in the woollen mill in Stalybridge. Following a turnout, however, the masters sent to Ireland saying that they would employ as many as would come over.

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<sup>60</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. vi.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. v.

Printed papers were sent over and many Irish moved into the neighbourhood.<sup>62</sup> Mr William Hartner, silk smallware manufacturer, also looked to Dublin to supply silk weavers in similar circumstances.<sup>63</sup>

The cotton industry expanded in the late eighteenth century to the extent that it provided more employment than any other trade in Britain. Up to the 1830s buoyant demand existed for English cotton cloth, both abroad and on the domestic market. Handloom cotton weavers were concentrated in North West England particularly in Lancashire south of the Ribble, Cheshire and the West Riding and also throughout the small villages in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Most of these weavers were producing calico but certain areas had particular specialisms. Generally speaking fancy and plain weavers could be found in larger towns whilst plain weavers were to be found in country villages.<sup>64</sup>

The majority of handloom weaving was organised around the putting out system. Materials would be collected from manufacturers or agents and the finished article returned within a week when fresh materials would be collected. Some master weavers employed journeymen within their own homes and some were employed in larger weaving sheds, where as many as 200 weavers could be found. The introduction of Arkwright's waterframe, which speeded up the spinning process without any equivalent innovation in weaving, meant that the number of handloom weavers grew in the first two decades of the century. The slump following the widespread adoption of the powerloom in 1826, however, began a slow decline of handloom weaving and ensured that the Irish finding employment in the trade could not expect a rosy future.

Many of the expert witnesses interviewed by the Royal Commission on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, acquired their insight into the subject as employers of Irish labour. Of the five hundred looms operated for Mr J. A. Turner of Manchester, half were worked by Irishmen. This work was organised on a putting out system at wages of 9s 6d a week. The looms and accoutrements belonged to the workers and cost approximately £2. Turner also ran a weaving shop in which looms were provided and which employed between 70 and 80 Irishmen.<sup>65</sup> The 'Irish stuff weavers' of the Bank district of Leeds were also organised on a putting out system, one of the principal manufacturers being Mr James Green. During a dispute over wages in early 1833 a 'mob' of stuff weavers visited the

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* evidence of James Oliver, p. 85.

<sup>63</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd May 1830.

<sup>64</sup> Bythell, D. *The Handloom Weavers: A Study in the English Cotton Industry During the Industrial Revolution*. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 28)

<sup>65</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. xiv.



strikebreakers, compelling them on threat of violence to 'carry back their work' unfinished to Green.<sup>66</sup> At a meeting of handloom weavers in St George's Fields, Manchester, to choose delegates to speak to a select committee investigating their plight, most speakers were Irishmen. The committee of eleven, appointed to select the delegates included 'Edward Curran, John West, Morrow and other Irishmen'<sup>67</sup> Within the factory several manufacturers employed Irishmen; half of the five hundred workers employed at spinning and powerloom-weaving in James Guest's mills were Irishmen.<sup>68</sup> Three quarters of the workforce in the handloom factory of Mr Thomas Harbottle and 120 handloom weavers in the woollen factory of Joseph Bell Clarke and partners, were Irish.<sup>69</sup> Mr James Taylor, owner of a silk mill at Newton Heath, employed 190 Irish out of a workforce of 500 as winders of silk. These were mostly boys and girls aged between seven and twenty years.<sup>70</sup>

Other skilled trades in which the Irish were well represented included shoemaking, tailoring and occupations within the building industry. Robert and James Kirkwood, a father and son who were transported for counterfeiting, were millwrights and according to their petition were 'excellent tradesmen of sober and industrious habits and were both most respectfully engaged in business in Liverpool at the time of their assailment'.<sup>71</sup> Patrick Mullen, transported for street robbery in April 1835, was a bricklayer like his father James Mullen, both being employed by master bricklayer Charles Worale.<sup>72</sup>

Within the large towns there were 'a considerable number of Irish journeymen tailors who hold equally high character with the natives.'<sup>73</sup> Master tailor John Petty estimated that there were 450 Irish journeymen tailors in Manchester and the Rev Fisher suggested a figure of 350 in Stalybridge.<sup>74</sup> Generally speaking, according to contemporary evidence, Irish mechanics and artisans were small in number:

To the higher departments of skilled industry such as mechanics they scarcely ever penetrate but even among the inferior kind of artisans such as carpenters, masons, bricklayers, there

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<sup>66</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19th January 1833.

<sup>67</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28th June 1839.

<sup>68</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. 66.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> HO/17/28, (Ct 37). Although the Kirkwood's prospects as millwrights were not good. With the increasing adoption of steam power, millwrights were supplanted by boilermen and other kinds of steam engineers.

<sup>72</sup> HO/17/28, (lv 13).

<sup>73</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. viii.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73 & p. 84.



are a few Irish and these are not remarkable for their excellence.<sup>75</sup>

David Bellhouse, a Manchester builder, estimated the number of Irish builders in the town at approximately 200 and also mentioned some few Irish among the joiners.<sup>76</sup>

According to contemporary opinion, the bulk of the Irish population in Great Britain consisted 'of common labourers who are chiefly employed in the towns at different kinds of coarse and unskilled work.'<sup>77</sup> Observers commented that they were employed particularly as 'bricklayers' labourers, in the soaperies, as porters on the dock and at other hard labour' and particularly 'in the several branches of the building trade as masons, bricklayers' and plasterers' labourers, brickmakers, quarreymen etc'<sup>78</sup> Samuel Holme, a Liverpool master-builder, employed 130 Irish bricklayers' labourers. He believed he had never had any but Irish filling these positions and he was quick to praise them:

'In general the Irish labourers are faithful, steady to their work and almost invariably honest. They are much trusted about the houses and I have seldom had any complaints against them. They are usually very intelligent, they are remarkably quick and sharp, especially in manner and conversation.'<sup>79</sup>

John Johnson, another Liverpool builder also praised his Irish labourers as 'very faithful servants' and stated that he 'would trust them with anything'.<sup>80</sup> Many Irishmen were employed in the Liverpool docks. Mr Thomas Dover, warehouse owner, estimated that one third of Liverpool porters were Irish and that when sober, these men were 'generally very efficient workers'.<sup>81</sup> Many Irish labourers were employed in soap manufacturing and chemical works in Liverpool. Of 20 men employed in James Rosson's soap works in Liverpool, one third were Irish and they did the roughest work. He estimated that there were probably 300 Irish employed in the soaperies and chemical works of Liverpool and 200 in the sugar works. George Birkett, clerk to Dranker & Co. sugar refiners, reported that 57 out of 155 employees in the works were Irishmen.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxi.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. ix.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p. ix.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

The present sample suggests that the Irish were only slightly less skilled than their English counterparts, as does a larger sample compiled by Nicholas and Shergold.<sup>83</sup> Contemporary opinion, however, is unanimous in stating that the Irish were invariably employed in low skilled jobs. This discrepancy requires a more detailed examination.

A partial explanation can be found in the initial costs of migration. Most immigrants would use up the majority of their limited capital on their journey and on accommodation and could not, therefore, necessarily afford the luxury of choosing work. This was explained by Rev. Daniel Hearne, a man particularly well positioned to observe the lives of his flock:

'When the Irish first come over they are usually very destitute and they do not get work immediately on coming over. Irish in these circumstances are assisted by their friends and frequently relatives, they are very charitable to one another.. when they first come over they generally get into debt and when they obtain work it takes them some time to clear off. This keeps them down for some time.'<sup>84</sup>

Patrick Fallan, convicted in 1834 for uttering base coin, had moved to Liverpool from Roscommon, with the intention of obtaining work as a writing clerk, but was unable to find such employment and was thus 'obliged to labour'. According to the petition filed by his parents, this nineteen year old was 'liberally educated' and 'classically bred' and had been intended for the church but for his family's failure in business.<sup>85</sup>

As Irish journeymen were less likely to have personal contact with English master artisans, having served apprenticeships in Ireland, they were, no doubt, often obliged to enter the less respectable areas of trade. Some were even tricked into jobs in the 'slop' sector. Contemporary newspapers recorded stories of unscrupulous Irish landlords clearing their lands of peasants, by encouraging them to migrate to Britain for jobs which did not exist.<sup>86</sup> The inexperience of many Irish migrants often exposed them to exploitation in the workplace, a fact which Mayhew sought to expose in his report of the kidnapping of Irish

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<sup>83</sup> S. Nicholas & P. Shergold, 'Human Capital and the Pre-Famine Irish Emigration to England. *Explorations in Economic History*, 24, (1987) p. 158-177.

<sup>84</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. 62.

<sup>85</sup> HO/17/28, (CI 42).

<sup>86</sup> See for example *The Manchester Guardian*, 16th January 1830.

hands in the sweated tailoring trade. He recounts the story of two journeymen tailors from Kerry who were 'induced' by the wife of a 'sweater' in London to return with her to that city, having been enticed by tales of high wages. They were promised 36s a week to begin with but soon found themselves unable to clear more than 5s a week. Their employer informed them that their low wages were a result of their lack of skill; they were simply incapable of working well enough for a London house. He then offered to instruct them, on condition that they bind themselves as apprentices to him for a year. Thus, two skilled journeymen were tricked into working as mere apprentices for a man whom they soon discovered was not 'a superior workman to either of them'.<sup>87</sup>

The naïveté and inexperience of many immigrants, compounded, as it must have been, by language difficulties, can be demonstrated by the volume of confidence tricks practised upon them, which were sufficient to draw public attention in both the press and in Parliament. Lieutenant Low, the government agent for emigration in the port of Liverpool, explained:

'Great distress sometimes prevails among the Irish from the detention of their ships by contrary winds and they are forced to live on their seastores. Sometimes also the agents engage them to come to Liverpool several weeks before the vessel is ready to sail which causes great distress among the Irish immigrants..Agents make money from them by lodging them etc. till they have no money left'.<sup>88</sup>

The following story was announced in the Liverpool Mercury in August 1833 as 'one of those disgraceful occurrences of outrage to strangers going to America'.<sup>89</sup> Thomas Magee came from Leitrim to Liverpool on 30th July, accompanied by his wife and five children 'with the intention of going immediately to America'. A Mr Foy, working in Mr Byrne's American Passengers Agency Office, offered to find him a passage and recommended him in the meantime to take up lodgings in his (Foy's) house. Magee explained that he was unable, for want of finances, to remain in Liverpool long and paid £10 to secure a passage on board the *Eagle*, which was to sail the following day. A passage ticket was drawn up, but for the wrong ship; Magee's ticket was valid for the *Sylvannus Jenkins* which did not sail until 14th August, during which time Foy was able to charge Magee and family for

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<sup>87</sup> E. P. Thompson & E. Yeo, (eds), The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle, 1849-50, (Merlin Press, London, 1971), p. 223

<sup>88</sup> Irish Poor, p. 33.

<sup>89</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 23rd August 1833.

board and lodgings. Another charge was brought against Foy, for the amount of £2 5s by a Mr McGarraghan who was also to have sailed on board the *Eagle*. In passing his sentence the judge stated his determination that 'if this practice prevailed to any extent in Liverpool it was high time to put a stop to it'. This 'practice' did indeed appear to be prevalent as the press campaign for the licensing of passenger agents for the protection of the emigrant demonstrates. A similar case involving the sale of invalid passages which took place in 1826, involved a group of 'damned rascals' who were known to 'constantly patrol the streets and dock gangways for this purpose.'<sup>90</sup> The victims in these cases were said to have 'little chance of getting their money back' and it is likely that many people used in this way and many more who arrived in Britain intending to stay only as long as it took to earn a passage to America, fell into casual labouring when they might well have been in possession of marketable skills.

As has already been stated, the main attraction for the Irish immigrant in coming to Britain was the possibility of more regular work at higher wages than were usual in Ireland. According to the investigations undertaken by Cornwall-Lewis and the Royal Commissioners in 1836, in most parts of Ireland, even in the towns, a common labourer would earn approximately 1s per day, occasionally as much as 1s 3d but more frequently as little as 10d or 6d with food.<sup>91</sup> In addition, this employment was not secure and labourers were forced to rely on small plots of potato land for subsistence. In England, the wages of a day labourer were considerably higher and more constant, to the extent that a bricklayer's labourer in Liverpool or Manchester could earn as much as 16s per week in winter and 18s in summer. Handloom weavers were among the worst paid in Britain in the 1830s earning around 9s 6d a week for fancy work and 7s-8s for plain work.<sup>92</sup> These low rates, however, were still higher than the wages for weavers in Ireland; the earnings of a Drogheda weaver 'did not exceed 4s a week' at this time.<sup>93</sup> Wage rates for unskilled labour in Britain, therefore, exceeded those for some skilled occupations in Ireland and on occasion in Britain. Hence, an Irish immigrant who needed to commence working at the first opportunity, might have been satisfied with the wages of rough, unskilled work.

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<sup>90</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 9th June 1826. According to Midwinter's sources the depravity of these landsharks was unequalled on any of the world's waterfronts. 'The 'runners' as the shipping touts were known, bamboozled the immigrants as they landed at Liverpool and worked them for lodgings, supplies and sea-fare. They were organised into syndicates, the most ill-famed of which was called 'the forty thieves'. The consequences of this dreadful and fraudulent trade pressed hard on Liverpool's poor relief.' Midwinter, E. *Old Liverpool*, David & Charles, Liverpool, 1971.

<sup>91</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. ix.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

Further inducements for potential migrants to the north of England were the employment and educational opportunities available for their families. This awareness of the long term benefits of migration, demonstrates the sophistication of the Irish migrant in making the decision to leave. Dr Collins of Liverpool testified to the importance of such considerations:

'...they have greater facility of getting their children bound to various trades than they have in their own country, where the labour is chiefly agricultural and it is a well known fact that many who settle as mere paupers by putting their children to the schools, if these children write a good hand and show the steadiness of character, frequently get them taken as clerks into merchants' and attorneys' offices and by time and industry they become comparatively influential members of society whereas no such facilities of rising in the world occur in their own country.'<sup>94</sup>

Samuel Holme, in conversation with an Irish labourer named Christopher Shields, learnt much concerning the motivation of immigrants entering Britain from Ireland:

'he said that the reason of his leaving Ireland was that in the County of Wexford, his own county, he could only get 6d a day and his own meat, that at one time he rented a small cabin with a potato patch and worked for the landlord. He then got 1s a day but the landlord charged him three pounds a year for his holding. He told me that he could get his clothing as cheap here as at home and generally all the things he wanted. He now gets 16s a week. He stated likewise that it was a great inducement to them to come here that they can get situations for their children which they could not get at home. He told me likewise that he could more easily get his children educated here than in Ireland.'<sup>95</sup>

Within the unskilled labour market competition was reduced according to contemporaries, because many English workers refused to do the work that the Irish were only too willing to undertake, as the Rev. James Crook explained:

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. v.

'The Irish are decidedly an industrious and hardworking people from their infancy they appear to have been inured to privation and hard labour and from this they are more patient than others of fatigue. They are more disposed to accept low wages for hard labour than the English and will more readily accept employment which the English refuse.'<sup>96</sup>

Unfortunately, the willingness of the Irish to undertake work which the English found unpalatable, served to reinforce existing prejudices concerning their capabilities. That prejudice was a problem for the Irish was grudgingly admitted in the report of the Royal Commission. Interestingly, those witnesses who provided the most positive evidence of the existence of anti-Irish prejudice, were themselves Irish and therefore presumably well qualified to speak on such a subject. Mr Michael Whitty, native of Wexford and superintendent of the nightly watch in Liverpool argued:

'there is a decided preference given to English operatives so that whenever English and Irish come into competition the preference is given to the English. This remark applies generally, for example, the Irish are nearly excluded from the dock police in this town and in the watch preference is given to the English but we cannot find them apparently for this reason that an Englishman of character and of the necessary quantity of intelligence is sure to find better employment but the Irish finding it hard to get employment in England are very eager to enter the watch; the preference given to the English in the watch does not arise from any prejudice in the minds of the Commissioners but from a belief in their superiority and perhaps from a desire to meet the feeling of the public..<sup>97</sup>

Mr Mark Falvey, a Corkman, who at the time of the enquiry had spent four years in business at Liverpool, stated:

'There is a decided prejudice against the poor Irish in Liverpool which has been weakened since I came here. It

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.



arose originally from religious and national differences of opinion and extended very generally through all classes.'<sup>98</sup>

Likewise clergymen in both Liverpool and Manchester admitted to the existence of prejudice. Reverend Thomas Fisher, parish priest of St Mary's, Edward Street, Liverpool said:

'I think in general the Irish have fair play in Liverpool though many have a prejudice against the Irish character and some dislike Catholics especially for female servants'<sup>99</sup>

Daniel Hearne stated his knowledge that:

'there are instances where the Irish are prevented from advancing in the world by feelings of jealousy. A manufacturer would prefer to employ English to Irish simply on the ground of their being Irish and not of their being worse workmen.'<sup>100</sup>

Organisations such as the Orange Order recruited from among the English working class in the north of England, and workers found membership beneficial, largely because of the employment opportunities which were to be found within the network. Certain trades, according to Neal, joined the Order in numbers including the shoemakers, the ropemakers and the shipwrights.<sup>101</sup> Such was the high incidence of Lodge membership amongst the ship's carpenters of Liverpool, that the 12th July anniversary became known for a time as Carpenters' Day. Clashes between ship's carpenters and Irish dock workers indicate the extent to which religious and political differences permeated the workplace and job market. The prevalence of xenophobia could also be seen in the dockworks, according to warehouse owner Thomas Dover. One third of Liverpool's porters were Irish, a number amounting to some two or three thousand, but there were few Irish warehousemen. Dover believed that 'the Irish porters labour under a great disadvantage as it is but natural to conclude the warehousemen will give preference to their own countrymen and I have frequently observed that the under-warehousemen and constant porters are very rarely Irish.'<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>101</sup> F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), p. 40.

<sup>102</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. 31.

The Report of the Royal Commission into the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, rather than disproving the existence of prejudice, attempts a defence of these attitudes. Hearne's statement is dismissed as being that of a man 'not specially conversant with manufactures' and preoccupied with the welfare of his flock. He apparently mistook for provincial jealousy a disapprobation which was based on 'rational and defensible motives' and Cornwall-Lewis declared that despite the enquiries he had made upon the subject, he was unable to ascertain 'any instance of persons preferring a worse workman because he was a native, to a better workman because he was an Irishman'.<sup>103</sup> It was inconceivable to think that a capitalist or speculator could ever let prejudice interfere with his pecuniary interest. The head of the Commission said nothing, however, about equal opportunities for *equally* qualified Irish workmen.

According to the Report, the unsuitability of the Irish for labour which required 'long sustained and close attention' and which was 'complicated with multifarious details' was due not to any lack of intellect but to a 'moral deficiency'.<sup>104</sup> This moral deficiency manifested itself most commonly in the form of laziness, improvidence and turbulence, all long cherished, stereotypical, imputed characteristics of the Irish. It is clear that in their reactions to, and assumptions about, Irish immigrants, many contemporaries were drawing on established notions of Irishness:

'A man who has no care for the morrow and who lives only for the present moment cannot bring his mind to undergo the severe discipline or to make those patient and toilsome exertions which are requisite to form a good mechanic. On account of the reckless and improvident habits which (from whatever cause) the Irish have too often formed in their own country, they are impatient or neglectful or indifferent and from these moral causes and not from any intellectual defect, they do their work ill or stop in the middle of it.'<sup>105</sup>

Samuel Holme attributed 'one third of the difference between the Irish and the Scotch to education and two thirds to national habits and nature'.<sup>106</sup> The caricatured Irishman will be examined in detail later on, but it is necessary to state at this juncture that English attitudes

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<sup>103</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. xv

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, evidence of Samuel Holme, p. xxxii.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

towards the Irish were based on the real observation of a few. Cultural differences, however, ensured these observations would be filtered through a distorting lens. Arthur Young's account of his tour of Ireland, published in 1780, did much to popularise the myth of the lazy Irishman.<sup>107</sup> Young's thesis discussed the method used to cultivate the staple crop of potatoes. This enabled the peasantry to meet most of their family's diet and nutrition needs on three months labour and gave them a degree of autonomy in the rural labour market. The 'lazy-bed' method had many advantages in relation to the Irish climate and the wet, badly drained land, but the concern for the mischief which might be caused by idle hands, blinded observers to its benefits and ensured that it was seen in a very negative light.<sup>108</sup>

The idea of the lazy Irishman was transported to the new communities. Manufacturers complained that the Irish could work harder and earn more, but seemed to be satisfied with a certain level of wages. Mr Potter, cotton manufacturer of Manchester, complained that the Irish were unwilling to adopt any improvement in the mode of doing their work. This he believed had nothing to do with stupidity, but was due to a satisfaction with their own condition, being as content with 9s or 10s a week as an Englishman would be with 14s or 15s.<sup>109</sup> Mr. J. A. Turner, another Manchester manufacturer, testified to the same problem:

'The Irish do less work in the course of the week than the English from which I infer that they are satisfied to earn less wages. We have a weaving shop in which the looms are found. There are between seventy and eighty Irish weavers employed in it, they are unwilling to come in on the Monday.. They seem quite satisfied with their wages and if they could get more I doubt whether they would not do less work. They seem satisfied with the kind of living which a certain amount of wages will produce and if the wages were to rise they would only play more.'<sup>110</sup>

Mr Thomas Harbottle, cotton manufacturer of Manchester, explained that the Irish were not as industrious or steady as the English because 'they appear to be satisfied with what will

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<sup>107</sup> A. Young, *Arthur Young's Tour in Ireland, 1776 - 1779*, (Published in 2 Volumes, Bell, London, 1792. Originally published 1780).

<sup>108</sup> R. N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1949) p. 235.

<sup>109</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. xiv.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

buy potatoes and salt and they will not work to get more.<sup>111</sup> Much of the misunderstanding between English employers and their Irish workforce originated in their different cultural traditions which created a conflicting economic dynamic and attitude towards work. The preoccupation of the capitalist was with increased efficiency and output, whereas a member of a pre-capitalist or subsistence economy sought only to produce enough and according to his/her own rhythm of work. Irish peasants had less experience of working for wages than their English counterparts and therefore had perhaps less concept of the market value of their labour and little idea of what to do with any surplus. Since the Irish failed to measure up to the capitalist construction of the idealised worker, they became objects of scorn and ridicule. They were cast as lazy, fickle and unreliable and this opinion was fed by existing racist notions of Irish inferiority. It is instructive to note that similar themes were played out elsewhere within the Empire. In South Africa, the existence of distinct African cultural practices and of alternative concepts of time and status, led to incomprehension between British employers and their workers. This gave rise to the epithet of the 'lazy kaffir'. Prejudice stood in the way of negotiation and employers failed to accommodate aspects of traditional work culture to colonial needs, thus under-estimating and under-utilising their workforce.<sup>112</sup> The accusation of improvidence, for example, was made with tedious regularity. The Irish, according to contemporaries, did not live equally well on equal wages as their English neighbours; the English priest at St Mary's, Liverpool gave a description of their typical living conditions:

'A large portion of the Irish are in a very low state, living in cellars and garrets, their furniture is very poor a pallet of straw, a stool, sometimes a table or an iron pot or frying pan, a jug for water, a few plates and a leaden or pewter spoon. Persons in this class live on potatoes and stirabout, now and then perhaps they may get a herring or a little bacon. There is a good deal of difference between the way of living of the English and Irish on equal wages; an Irishman will be content with his potatoes and herring, an Englishman will get meat.'<sup>113</sup>

Such apparent improvidence and low standards were important in generating anti-Irishness, particularly during the health crises of the 1830s, and was blamed on drunkenness,

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>112</sup> See K. E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic: Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*, (James King, London, 1993). Also P. Harries, *Culture, Work, Identity: Migrant Workers in Mozambique and South Africa, 1860-1910*, (James King, London, 1994).

<sup>113</sup> *Irish Poor*, evidence of Rev. Fisher, p. x.

excessive hospitality and the inefficiency of Irishwomen as housekeepers. The labouring Irish, after settling their rent and their 'score' at the shop, spent the entire remnant of their wages on drink.<sup>114</sup>

The fact that the 'remnant' or surplus of earnings was spent on recreation may be related to previous unfamiliarity with a purely cash income - what else to do with a surplus but spend it? The concern of employers to curb excessive and inappropriate recreation was related to their desire to inculcate work discipline throughout the entire workforce and, therefore, they may have been over sensitive to Irish conviviality.

One of the particularly improvident characteristics of the Irish, alleged by English contemporaries, which may have reflected a restrictive communalism, was their tendency to share their resources with friends and relatives. Holme was particularly struck by this behavior:

'I attribute their wretched way of living rather to their improvidence than to their drunkenness. In part also I attribute it to a foolish hospitality for they are very kind to one another. They assist one another in sickness and distress; Sometimes they send money to their friends in Ireland.'<sup>115</sup>

Many Irish immigrants came to northern England on the suggestion of friends and relatives and, as Reverend Daniel Hearne noted, they would often be supported by these contacts until they managed to 'find their feet'. This tradition of hospitality may have had some responsibility for hampering individual achievement. Reverend Collingridge of Birmingham explained communal sharing as resulting from generic poverty:

'They are very much more charitable to one another in sickness and in all manner of distress than the English. If an Irishman has a penny he will give half to another Irishman in distress. This is the natural effect of the general obloquy and wretchedness in which they all find themselves equally involved.'<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* p. xiii. 'On the Saturday night when they receive their wages they first pay the score at the shop from which they procure nearly all their articles of food and their rent if their room or lodgings is taken by the week and when their debts are thus paid they go on drinking spirits as long as the remnant of their wages holds out. On the Monday morning they are penniless and they begin a fresh score at the shop for the ensuing week which is paid off on the following Saturday and so on in succession.'

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxv.

This type of communal sharing was made all the more necessary because applicants for Poor Relief ran the risk of being returned to Ireland under the Settlement Laws.

Mr John Johnson, builder of Liverpool, also reported that many of the Irish sent money to relations at home.<sup>117</sup> The generosity of the Irish to one another was demonstrated in the number of passages which were paid by contacts in America. Mr Fitzhugh, a member of a company engaged extensively in conveying emigrants from Liverpool to New York, stated that from all the passages paid in America, three quarters were for the Irish in Ireland and of the remaining quarter, half were for the Irish resident in England. Ten years experience in this trade qualified him, he believed, to reckon that 'the disposition to assist relations and friends in this manner exists much more strongly among the Irish than among the English.'<sup>118</sup>

Evidence exists to suggest that although the Irish might not have invested surplus monies in business or home improvements this was related to cautiousness rather than sheer recklessness. Several commentators suggested that they commonly put money aside in order to retire back to Ireland. According to Rev. Hearne:

'When they have paid off their debts many attempt to lay up small sums of money for the purpose of returning and living in their own country. The majority appear anxious to go back if they could live equally well in Ireland.'<sup>119</sup>

A shopkeeper trading in an Irish area of Manchester confirmed that although some Irish wasted money in drinking, the 'greater part' were careful and saved money with the intention of returning home.<sup>120</sup> In addition to all the demands placed on the finances of the Irish by relatives and friends at home and by the newly arrived and also by savings, they gave very generously to their Church and to their political leaders as will be seen below.

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxv.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p. 62.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* evidence of A. B, p. 74. 'I should think that, take our neighbourhood through, there is not above one out of four of the heads of families who has not got money by him. Most of them have got gold. If they have a sovereign or a half sovereign they will generally do anything before they will change it; they will sooner pawn their clothes or borrow money. They save with a view of returning to Ireland. The greater part of them are very fond of their own country.'



The word which appears to be most associated with the Irish by their English employers is 'turbulent'. The evidence on Irish membership of trades unions is patchy and contradictory in nature. Those migrants who came from urban Ireland would have been familiar with them as Dublin was very unionised. Many Irish belonged to Ribbon Societies which provided tramp benefits and employment networks and thus offered the main benefits associated with trades unions. It appears that whatever support was given to the movement by the Irish was limited by the interference of the clergy. Virtually every employer giving evidence to the Royal Commission mentions the Irish tendency towards turbulence and turn-outs and it is likely that the clannishness and inclination of the Irish to cluster together was given a more sinister interpretation:

'The Irish are frequently plotting and are always ready for a turn-out. They are more given to combination than the English. The late turn-out of mechanics and labourers has been almost entirely organised by the Irish; they are all bound together by secret oaths which were probably suggested by the Irish and although the Irish were the poorest mechanics they took the lead in this turn-out. The English submitted in the most singular manner to be led by the nose.'<sup>121</sup>

If the Irish were indeed of a more 'mutinous disposition' than their English counterparts this may also have been related to their difficulties in obtaining poor relief; they had much less to lose. Some employers admitted that if the English were in the same position their behavior would be similar:

'Under the same circumstances I do not think the Irish more disposed to riot and disturbance than the English.'<sup>122</sup>

Much of what was taken as evidence of unionisation was simply a manifestation of communal solidarity. Just as the closeness of factory work fostered collective feeling so did the existence of residentially segregated communities. Irish areas such as the Bank in Leeds, where residents were also bound together through employment, facilitated mobilisation. Information was exchanged with ease and a sense of solidarity, which suggested formal organisation, could be achieved almost spontaneously. This was apparent whenever the police, bailiffs or customs officers attempted to exert their authority within such areas. One employer said in exasperation 'there is no knowing where to find them in

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* evidence of Samuel Holme, p. 28.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* evidence of Mr James Guest, p. 66.

their habitations and if one man is offended the whole take his part so that it is impossible to govern them or to be on good terms with them.' <sup>123</sup> The deputy constable of Manchester explained that:

'It is extremely dangerous to execute a warrant in a factory where many Irish are employed; they will throw bricks and stones at the officers' heads as they are coming up the stairs and frequently succeed in driving them off. We are then forced to wait and if possible take the man by strategem...the Irish are very easily hurried into violence even by a single one of their countrymen and at a moment's notice; five minutes will bring together a thousand people at any time.'<sup>124</sup>

On the question of trade union membership, the Irish were often placed in a double bind. Whilst some employers rejected them as notorious turn-outs, others refused to employ them because they did not belong to a trade union and this also caused resentment among fellow English workers. A long correspondence debate took place in the Leeds Mercury in 1832, between the Irish cloth weavers of the town and their former employer, Mr William Hirst. The cloth weavers on this occasion had withdrawn from the union, probably on the advice of their priest, and Mr Hirst was under obligation to subscribers who were assisting him through his business difficulties and who were demanding only unionised labour. Hirst wrote, therefore:

'Whoever has advised you to withdraw from the union have not been your friends. For my part I shall employ none but those who are members of the union.'<sup>125</sup>

Another incident in Liverpool demonstrates the hazards involved in not belonging to a union. Thomas Mead, a coachmaker from Armagh, had come to Liverpool in order to embark for America. Finding himself short of money, he went to the shop of a man named Fagan to ask for work. When Fagan discovered that Mead did not belong to a trade union, not only did he refuse him work, but beat him severely, shouting, 'Oh oh, you are one of the black sheep.'<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. evidence of Mr Joseph Bell Clarke, p. 67.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. evidence of Mr J. S. Thomas, p. xli.

<sup>125</sup> Leeds Mercury, 4th August 1832.

<sup>126</sup> Leeds Mercury, 3rd October 1835.

There is little doubt that long held opinions and prejudices towards the Irish were reinforced in Britain and used as excuses for low wages or for not employing Irish labour at all. The behavior of Aaron Lees, a Manchester cotton manufacturer, bears testimony to this:

'They are the worst part of the population, usually the first to turn out and the first to commence riots, in fact there is no recklessness of conduct which they do not display. I bought a mill a short time ago at Crompsall and the first thing I did was to get every man out of the cottages giving them money as an inducement to get them to leave.'<sup>127</sup>

In his book Urban Poverty, Treble discusses at length the coping strategies employed by those in dire poverty and it can be seen that in the same way the Irish developed their own means to deal with the difficulties of finding work in Britain.<sup>128</sup> One career option open to those with even a tiny amount of capital, was that of hawking or peddling. The possibility of making a living with a minimum of outlay can be seen by considering the case of Patrick Fearon who, with his son, was brought before the courts in Rochdale for selling from door to door without a licence. The large bundle they carried with them, which was wrapped in a dirty old shawl, was found to contain a number of patchwork bedcovers entirely composed of tab-ends with excise marks taken from printed calicos. Fearon explained that his daughter had pawned her clothes to purchase as 'a last resource' the tab-ends for which he paid fourpence per half pound at Manchester. These shreds were then sewn together by his wife and daughter. This case demonstrates the difficult circumstances in which many Irish lived but is also testimony to considerable initiative and resourcefulness and excites sympathy for his plea to the court, 'not to be too hard on him, they had done it with an intention of getting bread honestly.'<sup>129</sup>

According to the evidence of contemporaries the Irish were very involved in the retail trade. Mayhew mentions many Irish amongst the street sellers of London; in Manchester they were virtually monopolising the market; and in Greenock they apparently filled 'all the low

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<sup>127</sup> Irish Poor, p. x.

<sup>128</sup> J. H. Treble, Urban Poverty, (Batsford Academic, London, 1979) p. 124.

<sup>129</sup> Manchester Guardian, 4th September 1830.

departments of retail trading as itinerant hawkers, pedlars or vendors of fruit.<sup>130</sup> Indeed the Irish were perceived as having a degree of natural ability in retailing:

'They show a great fitness for business and alertness in their dealings when they have had any advantages of education and have learnt writing and arithmetic. A little education would make them a very superior people; they show considerable capacities; if they were properly trained and educated they would be fully equal to us in commercial transactions. In fact some of them seem to have a natural ability for dealings, they seem to be in their element when buying or selling.'<sup>131</sup>

One of the main reasons for Irish success in retail trade was their ability to maintain a competitive edge. According to contemporaries the Irish chose a much lower standard of living in order to maximise their profit margins<sup>132</sup> Undoubtedly the majority of these individuals remained smalltime dealers but there were success stories:

'There are many who come over penniless who have raised themselves to tradesmen and some who have become merchants and retired from business.'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> H. Mayhew, *London Labour*, (Vol. 2, London, 1861) p. 12, *Irish Poor*, p. viii.

<sup>131</sup> *Irish Poor*, evidence of Mr Cameron, agent for the Glasgow & Londonderry Steampacket Company, p. viii.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, evidence of Mr Howarth, toll-collector at Manchester market, p. viii. 'The Irish live in much worse lodgings and on worse food than the English and are thus able to sell their goods at a much lower price; they are contented with less profit. They set up their concern gradually and carry on their trade with £2; very few get on and rise to be small shopkeepers. There are probably about four hundred Irish stallkeepers in the market. They are like the Jews, bartering and running down the farmer after they have got possession of his stuff so that he is almost forced to take what they will give. They are much harder dealers than the English and get articles at lower prices.'

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, evidence of Rev. Vincent Glover, priest of St Peter's, Liverpool, p. 22. In researching his *Life and Labour of the London Poor*, Mayhew interviewed an Irishman who had achieved some success in the sale of coke and his experience is worth recounting: 'I am a native of the south of Ireland. More nor twenty years ago I came to London. I had friends working in a gas factory and afther a time they managed to get me into the work too. My business was

to keep the coals in the stokers and when they emptied the retorts to wheel the coke in barrows and empty it on the coke heap. I worked for four or five years off and on at this place. I was sometimes put out of work in the summer time because they don't want as many hands then.....well, I got to be a stoker, I had better wages then and a couple

of pots of beer in the day. It was dreadful hard work and as hot, aye, as if you were in the inside of an oven..I wasn't a bit too fond of it at any rate for it ud kill a horse, so I sez to the wife, 'I can't stand this much longer Peggy'. Well behold you, Peggy begins to cry and wring her hands thinkin' we'd starve but I knew a grate dale better nor that, for I was two or three thimes dhrinkin' with some of thim that carry the coke out of the yard in sacks to sell to the poor people and they had twice as much money to spind as me that was working like a horse from morning till night. I had a pound or two put by for I was always savin' and by this time I knew a grate many people about, so off I goes and asks one and another to take a sack of coke from me and being known in the yard and standing a drop of dhrink now and then for the fillers, I always got good measure.....in a short time I could count up thirty or forty guineas in the bank..I bought a horse and cart and within one month had every farthin' back in the bank.'

Mayhew, p. 86

A particularly profitable trade, virtually monopolised by the Irish, was the manufacture and sale of illegally distilled spirits, known as poitin. Poitin was very much part of rural life in Ireland, providing a much needed second income for the peasantry. Connell has argued that the reason for its popularity had also to do with its superiority over parliament whiskey and its use on ceremonial occasions such as weddings, wakes, christenings and stations.<sup>134</sup> The fact that these customs continued in the new migrant communities necessitated the production of illicit spirits in Britain. Indeed, illicit distillation in Britain had even more economic potential, as it was sold not only for private consumption and in public houses, but to chemists and other tradesmen for industrial purposes.<sup>135</sup> Witnesses agreed on the widespread nature of illicit distilling; newspapers regularly reported the adventures of the Excise in recovering illicit whiskey and its manufacturers. Mr Pritchard, Officer of the Excise in Manchester and Salford, estimated in 1836 that the annual loss to the Revenue in Manchester alone amounted to £20 000 per year.<sup>136</sup> According to the Manchester Guardian:

'During 1832, more than thirty persons, almost all of whom were Irish were committed to the New Bailey having been convicted either distilling, hawking or possessing spirits. Half carried on the trade before and one third had been previously convicted.'<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, the potential rewards of the business meant the risk of imprisonment was worth taking. Illicit distilling was a group activity, carried out with the support of the whole community, who as consumers were implicated in the process. This was a factor in forging an introverted and defensive community, seen most clearly on the occasions when the Excise attempted to make arrests. Upon detection, an individual would endeavour to take sole responsibility, thus enabling the remainder of the group to continue the business during his temporary absence. The equipment recovered during the arrest of Patrick O'Donnell and Philip Neham in Liverpool in December 1835, gives some idea of the size of the enterprise:

'On the premises they found ten casks for eighteen to thirty-six gallons each, six tubs, one still at work, one copper worm between five and six gallons of wash, a tin cask, funnel, basket, glass

<sup>134</sup> K. Connell, Irish Peasant Society: Four Historical Essays, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968) p. 15-16.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>136</sup> Irish Poor, p. xxiii.

<sup>137</sup> Manchester Guardian, 13th April 1833.

According to Pritchard the casks generally held from thirty to fifty gallons and the spirit, which varied dramatically in quality was commonly made from treacle or spoiled beer:

'They can make it of any strength; we sometimes take it in ten or twelve or even seventeen or twenty five over proof; they make it strong in order to lessen its bulk and then dilute it afterwards. It is made in such a hurried way that in general it is of an inferior quality. They tell me they get ten shillings a proof gallon for it... I have been told that this illicit spirit is sold in many of the liquor vaults. Some of my informers have told me that the illicit distillers cannot execute their orders fast enough.'<sup>139</sup>

Another tactic adopted by the Irish to ease their employment difficulties, was to attempt to monopolise any area of work to which they did gain access. The creation of what O Tuathaigh refers to as the 'Hibernian closed-shop' had important consequences for Irish immigrants and their employment opportunities.<sup>140</sup> The difficulty of obtaining work with the necessary speed may have encouraged skilled workers to accept a lower skilled job within the community. One method of driving out competition in the retail trade, was to undercut, which according to market inspectors was squeezing out English traders:

'The Irish are also gradually getting possession of the Manchester market; a few years ago they were about a fourth, now they are at least three fourths of the stallkeepers.'<sup>141</sup>

According to the Report on the State of the Irish Poor, the Irish were also beginning to monopolise the role of bricklayers/masons labourers, as a result of their efforts to 'keep out the natives' and the unwillingness of the English to work at so 'disagreeable a kind of labour.'<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 25th December 1835.

<sup>139</sup> *Irish Poor*, p. 77.

<sup>140</sup> M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain: Problems of Integration', in Swift & Gilley, *The Irish in the Victorian City*, Croom Helm, 1985, p. 19

<sup>141</sup> *Irish Poor*, Evidence of Mr Howarth, toll collector, p. viii.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p. v.



That the English were disinclined to take up this work may have been due in part to the antics employed by the Irish to put them off. Mr David Bellhouse, a master builder in Manchester, explained that the Irish kept the builders' labourers jobs to themselves, by either playing malicious tricks on the English, or by working unusually hard for a few days in order to tire them.<sup>143</sup> Mr James Muspratt owned two alkali works, in one of which seventy Irish were employed and in the other only four out of one hundred. The proportion of Irish in the second factory could not be increased because 'they contended with the English and wished totally to exclude them'.<sup>144</sup> Unfortunately, this defensive behavior meant that the Irish were prevented from escaping the unskilled labour market.

### **Conclusion**

The present sample of Irish convicts sentenced to transportation in Yorkshire and Lancashire suggests that the Irish in these areas were more literate and skilled than those remaining in Ireland, and as literate and only slightly less skilled than their English hosts. This supports Mokyr's thesis that Irish migrants represented the cream of the Irish working population. Contemporary evidence suggests, however, that the Irish were generally employed in low skilled occupations in their new homes and this chapter has offered possible reasons for this. Necessity may have been a large factor in encouraging migrants to accept jobs for which they were overqualified. Undoubtedly, however, prejudice had a large part to play in keeping the Irish in the low skilled sector. English stereotypes of the Irish often made it difficult for them to see the Irish as anything other than lazy, improvident and turbulent and thus fit only for the lowest departments of manual labour. The same prejudice kept the Irish in these low skilled jobs while they simultaneously attempted to establish Hibernian 'closed shops' as a defence mechanism. The strategies deployed by the Irish to circumvent their difficulties in obtaining work, demonstrate considerable initiative and entrepreneurship and forced many witnesses to agree that their labour was necessary within the economy of British towns. Even the Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain concluded that the Irish 'are more ready and versatile and importunate' than their English neighbours.<sup>145</sup> Prejudice was not, however, the sole preserve of the English and Irish patterns of residence suggest an inclination to keep themselves apart from their English neighbours. It is to an understanding of the prejudices of both communities that the following two chapters will be devoted.

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

## **Section Two: The Construction and Maintenance of Identity**

## Chapter Two

### That other island : English attitudes towards the Irish

'The invention of Britishness was so closely bound up with Protestantism, with war with France and with the acquisition of empire, that Ireland was never able or willing to play a satisfactory part in it.'<sup>9</sup>

Thus Linda Colley explains why Ireland does not feature in her examination of the forging of British national identity in the eighteenth-century. What Colley means is that the Irish played no part in creating a participatory sense of Britishness. She fails, however, to recognise their role as foil or 'other', which she willingly ascribes to the French. For reasons of religion and colonisation, Ireland was the obvious, and earliest, 'black' to England's 'white'. This chapter addresses the development of the Irish stereotype, that most vicious and essential weapon of colonisation, its impact in terms of the construction of Englishness and its implications for the Irish in Britain. It will be proposed that the English view of the Irish was so early and so deeply imbibed as to provide a whole frame of reference which they were unable to operate outside of. The identification of the Irish as the 'other' has obvious implications for the difficulty of integrating Irish immigrants into English society. To this end, the reactions of the English working classes to Irish immigrants will be considered, as will the opinions of those with the power to enshrine their attitudes in legislation.

Colley argues that people began to identify themselves as British because:

'circumstances impressed them with the belief that they were different from those beyond their shores and in particular different from their prime enemy, the French. Not so much consensus or homogeneity or centralisation at home as a strong sense of dissimilarity from those without, proved to be the essential cement.'<sup>10</sup>

In reality, Britons would have had far more contact with the Irish 'other' than with the French and differentiation at a local level was extremely important in creating a sense of Britishness. Colley emphasises the importance of Britain's island status to its sense of identity but this geographical reality meant that even under the union Ireland would almost remain outside the Pale. Colley argues that the wars with France in the period 1707-1815 meant that Protestantism became a 'unifying and distinguishing bond as never before' but

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<sup>9</sup> L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, (Pimlico, London, 1992), p. 8

<sup>10</sup> L. Colley, *op.cit.*, p. 17

religious differences were very much a preoccupation of the English colonisation of Ireland.<sup>11</sup> Anti-Catholicism in Britain was not restricted to French Catholics alone. The Irish were doubly suspect as Catholics and as the colonized, therefore the stereotype, providing a frame of reference or a map of the mind, was an essential colonial tool. Just as Salisbury declared drily that 'the most disagreeable part of the three kingdoms is Ireland and therefore Ireland has a splendid map so in the colonial mind stereotypes were used, as a behavioral map and means of control.<sup>12</sup> As the stereotype enabled the individual to understand or know more clearly those around him it became an essential part of colonial ideology, for every regime of representation is a regime of power, as Foucault indicated with the power/knowledge couplet. Thus 'with the mission to impose a central administration went the attempt to define a unitary Irish character.'<sup>13</sup>

The contradictory benign and malevolent style of representing the Irish requires investigation. Years of contact and conflict filled a venomous reservoir of negative stereotypes whose depth varied according to the circumstances of the day. Indeed, the first half of the nineteenth-century was a particularly unfortunate time to be Irish in Britain. The Repeal Movement, Catholic emancipation, the tithe agitation and the Condition of England Question, all contributed to the scapegoating of this immigrant community.

Stereotypes were used to provide justifications when the actions of the coloniser 'flagrantly violated the behavioral norms of the metropolitan society'.<sup>14</sup> Thus the Spanish Conquistadors excused their excesses in South America by dehumanising the indigenous peoples in the first place and then by arguing that colonisation and conversion were conferring benefits on them. Similarly, the Bull *Laudabiliter* of Pope Adrian IV (1155), which provided Henry II with support for his political claims on Ireland, encouraged the English invasion of Ireland by arguing that a moral, religious, ecclesiastical and cultural reform was called for. This was confirmed by the writer Giraldus Cambrensis, who accompanied Henry's son John to Ireland and was himself related to many of the Norman invaders. His *Expugnatio Hibernica* written in the late 1180s, was apparently intended as a vindication of the actions of the invaders and of the English Crown in Ireland generally. Giraldus believed that the conquest of Ireland was necessary because the Irish were clearly primitive, or 'barbari', and the Anglo-Normans their moral and cultural superiors. He presented Ireland as a weird and wild place, full of outlandish sights. For him, Irish society

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>12</sup> J. Andrews, *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in the Nineteenth Century*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975), p. v

<sup>13</sup> D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, (Vintage, London, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> R. Lebow, 'White Britain and Black Ireland', p. 18

was 'a pool of the blackest ignorance, barbarity and superstition' as demonstrated by its lack of urbanisation. For him this clearly established Irish inferiority vis-a-vis the English.<sup>15</sup>

The process of justifying conquest and domination was extremely important, not just in terms of the representation of the Irish but also for the English self-image. This developed as an essential but almost unconscious corollary. In order to justify their treatment of the Irish it was not enough to say that the Irish were uncivilised, lazy and superstitious. Their conquerors had to be more civilised, more industrious and more rational. This process was more important with Ireland than with later colonies because, as the Irish had no marked difference in skin colour, they were not easily labeled uncivilised on such grounds. An excuse was even more necessary because the Irish were Christian. The rhetoric which would justify later imperial expansion did not comfortably fit this case, leaving the motive of territorial seizure for economic exploitation and political security all too obvious. It was, therefore, crucial to exploit the differences (or to fabricate them) and to use them as proof of Irish inferiority. As Kiberd has stated " If England had never existed the Irish would have been rather lonely. Each needed the other for the purpose of defining itself."<sup>16</sup> Differences had to be overemphasised because they were not particularly obvious. The truth behind English treatment of the Irish 'may have owed much to the remarkable similarity of two opposed people'.<sup>17</sup>

The dangers inherent in similarity had been made clear by the extent of assimilation between the Anglo-Normans and the native Irish. This was a lesson which the 'new' English arrivals of the Tudor period were quick to learn. The focus of blame became the Anglo-Normans, who lived happily enough among the native Irish, delighting in their language, manners and customs. They had also failed to conquer Ireland completely and to make their role in governing the country indispensable. This failure could be blamed on their descent into Irish barbarity and thus the old justification of a superior moral force could still be utilised. The Anglo-Normans were viewed by the new settlers as degenerates, seduced by their surroundings. Ireland came to be seen, in a negative sense, as a bewitching and seductive country. As Spenser lamented, 'Lord, how quickly doth that country alter men's natures.'<sup>18</sup> The very air was suspected of encouraging alleged Irish characteristics, such as

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<sup>15</sup> 'This people then is one of forest dwellers, and inhospitable, a people living off beasts and like beasts; a people that yet adheres to the most primitive way of pastoral living. For as humanity progresses from the forest to the arable fields and thence towards village life and civil society, this people, spurning agricultural exertions, having all too little regard for material comfort and a positive dislike of all the rules and legalities of civil intercourse, has been able neither to give up nor to abandon the life of the forests and pastures which it has hitherto been living, Quoted by J. Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael*, p. 37

<sup>16</sup> Kiberd, *op.cit.* p. 9

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in D. G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, ( Routledge, London, 1982), p. 1



violence and sloth. Thus infectiousness became an excuse for English violence. Indeed, with Spenser came English unease over colonial policy in Ireland, more particularly the use of barbaric methods to 'civilise' the barbarian. This became more pronounced over time as Protestantism encouraged a self-image of liberality, rationality and toleration. The English could justify their barbaric treatment of the Irish with the argument that violence was the only language barbarians could comprehend. The English themselves in this mindset were not barbaric, because they had a higher purpose; therefore the end justified the means. The paradox was that there could be no end;

'The argument was undoubtedly a circular and self-justifying one: colonisation and conquest of a barbarous country and people could be justified on the grounds that if a country were not barbarous then it would not need colonisation; the very fact that it was being colonised was proof of its barbarity and its barbarity was further proof of the need to colonise it.'<sup>19</sup>

The excuse of native barbarity thus became crucial to the English self-image but for many this justification was unconvincing. Carlyle's concerns over English misrule in Ireland reflect this concern perfectly:

'A government and guidance of white European men which has issued in perennial hunger of potatoes to the third man extant - ought to drop a veil over its face and walk out of court under conduct of proper officers; saying no word; expecting now of a surety sentence either to change or die. The Irish national character is degraded, disordered, till this recover itself nothing is yet recovered. Immethodic, heady, violent, mendacious, what can you make of the wretched Irishman? England is guilty towards Ireland and reaps at last in full measure the fruit of fifteen generations of wrong doing.'<sup>13</sup>

The doubt and discomfort which dominance over Ireland engendered, in terms of the inconsistencies within the theory and practice of the creation of an English self-image, ensured that Ireland became, and remains, something of a blindspot in the English consciousness. This situation meant that the Act of Union could be passed with little

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<sup>19</sup> D. G. Boyce, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> T. Carlyle, 'Chartism', *Selected Writings*, (James Fraser, London, 1839. Reprinted Penguin, London, 1971), p. 168

concern for the equal rights of subjects incorporated under it. Hence, the Irish arriving in Britain were seen more as strange, foreign immigrants and interlopers rather than internal migrants. Tellingly, separate and different administration and legislation were strong features of Ireland under the Union:

'Although formally part of the same state (Ireland) was not and could not have been ruled in the same fashion as Great Britain. Yet to rule her in a different fashion made a mockery of the Act of Union. The need to treat Ireland as a subordinate collided constantly with the policy of converting her into a component of an integrated society in the British Isles. It also vitiated the policy of converting Irishmen into outer Britons.'<sup>14</sup>

Psychologists have argued that intergroup conflict has an effect not just on the outgroup, but also on the way group members respond to one another, thus:

'A threatening outgroup may increase ingroup solidarity and the awareness of own ingroup identity. Real threat further reduces the risk of defection from the group by increasing punishments and rejection of defectors. In other words real threat increases ethnocentrism, that is, a state that is characterised by heightened ingroup solidarity and a devaluation of other outgroups.'<sup>15</sup>

This process can be seen in English colonisation of Ireland by the introduction of a policy of cultural anglicization, which made clear the idea that political and cultural allegiance were one and the same. The 1366 Statutes of Kilkenny forbade the King's English subjects from adopting Gaelic customs and limited the intercourse between the two populations as much as possible, since experience taught that Gaelic barbarism was infectious. This anglicisation policy was revived by Henry VIII, under whom Irish culture was seen as both barbaric and subversive. Thus, although natives were nominally subject to English law, their alleged barbarism precluded them from having any rights under it.

The impact of the Reformation was very significant in enabling the 'new' English to sustain the myth of Irish barbarity. The maintenance of the Catholic religion in Ireland provided an

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<sup>14</sup> O. MacDonagh, *Ireland: The Union and its Aftermath*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1977), p. 33

<sup>15</sup> W. Stroebe & C. A. Insko, 'Stereotype, Prejudice and Discrimination: Changing Conceptions in Theory and Research', in D. Bar-Tal (ed.) *Stereotyping and Prejudice: Changing Conceptions*, (Springer Verlans, New York, 1989), p. 14

important difference between colonised and coloniser which gave 'proof' of Irish incivility and of their racial inferiority. Catholicism became the badge of an inferior people. English insecurity caused by the threat from Continental Catholic powers contributed to increasing suspicion and prejudice towards Catholics. The Tudor State made religious conformity a test of loyalty to the crown, and the new colonists assumed that the same should be demanded of Ireland. In this period, the formal identification of the Irish nation with the Catholic people of Ireland took place which was to have such a lasting influence on Irish nationalism. Protestantism became central to English identity and contributed enormously to the existing self-image of rationality, bravery, superiority and free-thinking. Conversely, Catholics were often seen as ignorant, cringing and superstitious, images which complemented and confirmed certain existing opinions of the Irish. Protestantism also encouraged the construction of liberty and toleration as characteristics in the English self-image. These, however, did not sit comfortably in the ideology of imperialism. Hence the constant need to maintain stereotypes as justifications for colonisation and intolerance. Accounts of Ireland into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reveal the continuing reproduction of the colonial attitude that any divergence from the English norm signalled Irish moral inferiority and innate rebelliousness. The same aspects of the stereotype were repeated: the Irish were lazy, violent, comical/stupid and bestial. As the Spanish had become aware, dehumanising and patronising the native was a useful means of promoting policy. The Irish were degraded to the point of being likened to animals, a motif which was to reach its zenith in nineteenth-century political cartoons where the Irish were portrayed with simian features.<sup>16</sup>

The Irish were seen as a threat, hence differences between the two population groups were exaggerated both in order to extenuate policy and because of genuine fear. The Irish language was an obvious cause for concern, since it enabled rebels to plot with less danger of discovery. To speak Irish was to arouse suspicion since, as Spenser stated, 'the speech being Irish, the heart must needs be Irish'. Such attitudes prevailed among the Irish migrants in England long after the language had entered into decline. In 1817 the Beadle of St Giles, being questioned by a select committee on the extent of fraudulent claims in the parish, described his investigations:

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<sup>16</sup> See L.P.Curtis, *Apes & Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. (Newton Abbot, David & Charles, London, 1971) *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anglo-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*. (Bridgeport, 1968)

'if we go into a room to inquire after any of them they begin talking Irish. I have found so much imposition in consequence of that, that I immediately take them to the board and the board will not relieve them where they see a disposition of that sort.'<sup>17</sup>

Thus, even in the nineteenth century, the use of the Irish language was viewed in a very negative light as evidence of a conspiratorial nature. Differences in appearance, such as they were, were exaggerated and infused with dubious meanings. The 'long great coat' commonly worn by the peasantry was still causing anxiety at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, as it was suspected of concealing weapons. Maria Edgeworth used this garment to hint at the dubious nature of the character Thady Quirke, quoting Spenser's description of the cloak as a 'fit house for an outlaw, a meet bed for a rebel and an apt cloak for a thief',<sup>18</sup>

Fear, therefore, caused the coloniser to be unduly suspicious which contributed to the menacing, violent, lawless stereotype, and provided the excuse to conquer and destroy. Fear was also responsible, however, for the creation of the harmless, idiotic Paddy, a character who both flatters and comforts the coloniser. Paddy represented the ignorant child, lacking the intelligence or ability to manage his own affairs. The dual nature of the stereotype created the contradictions within it. For example, the Irishman is stupid on the one hand but cunning on the other. This is what Gilley refers to as the stereotype's benign and malignant elements.<sup>19</sup> The 'virtues' which form its 'benign' face (generosity, hospitality, a natural tendency for song and dance and courage in battle) are, however, either unthreatening or innate and instinctive rather than rational and controlled. Indeed, Gilley admits that the 'key to these qualities is a quickness of spirit and spontaneity sometimes bordering on impulsive rashness.' Thus the Irish, like children, were represented as innocent to a degree, but easily led astray and therefore in need of a firm, paternal hand. Colley argues that 'nothing succeeds like success', citing British military achievements as evidence for development of national confidence and identity. She also notes, however, the problems which expanding power entailed in terms of justifying aggression and insecurity about how to manage their expanding Empire.<sup>20</sup> Propaganda was essential in building English self-confidence and ethnic stereotyping was central to this process. The

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<sup>17</sup> Select Committee on Poor Laws, PP. Vol 6, 462, 1817, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> M. Edgeworth, Castle Rackrent, (Joseph Johnson, London, 1800. Reprinted Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980) p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> S. Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1780-1900', in C. Holmes (ed.) Immigrants and Minorities in British Society, (London, Allen & Unwin, 1978).

<sup>20</sup> L. Colley, op. cit. p. 101

development of the stage Irishman and theatricalised representation of ethnicities in general, demonstrate the progress of such propaganda, as Cave has said:

'One may see this operate in the generation of subversion in order to contain it, and the definition and display of subversives and enemies in order to subjugate them. This is a routine operation of all discourses of power, but it is particularly necessary for colonial and imperial power which is both more and less monolithic than regal or State power more in need of a justifying self-image and more beset by the conflicting claims of those it seeks to dominate.'<sup>21</sup>

English crises of confidence required the reassuring figure of the harmless, foolish and loyal Irishman whose role was to 'flatter English national feelings' and who became a familiar figure on the Irish stage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, the outrage with which the first appearance of Sir Lucius O'Trigger in Sheridan's 'The Rivals' in 1775 was received, indicates the power of this stereotype among English audiences. The character of O'Trigger was considered a national libel on Ireland but this had nothing to do with his Irish attributes. It was in presenting O'Trigger as a duellist, that is, a dangerous Irishman, that Sheridan:

'indirectly hurt the fabric of accomodation and precluded harmony that was woven in the interest and to the amusement of the English audience... Sir Lucius is thus presented as a dangerous intrusion in and disruption of English placidity.'<sup>22</sup>

The reworked character of O'Trigger was accepted by audiences because he became recognizable as an Irishman. Any degree of unpredictability is threatening to those in power, since it implies their ignorance and thus questions their ability to control. This need to emphasise the predictable idiocy of the Irishman explains the popularity of the 'Irish bull', the first manifestation of the Irish joke, which provided comedy material for novelists and journalists alike. These were employed commonly in the newspapers of the nineteenth-century as a way of undermining the Irish by removing their threatening aspect.

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<sup>21</sup> J. S. Bratton, R. Cave, B. Gregory, H. Holder & M. Pickering (eds) *Acts of Supremacy: the British Empire & the Stage, 1790 – 1930*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1991) p. 9-10

<sup>22</sup> Leersen, *op. cit.* p. 165



The contradictory characteristics within Gilley's benign/malignant Irish stereotype might also be related to the 'two types' of Irishman, that is Catholic and Anglo-Irish. The latter were less threatening as their loyalty was more to be relied upon but they were still seen as provincial and bombastic, that is, as the foolish and bumbling Irishman which the reworked O'Trigger became.

Despite the fixity implied by the word, stereotypes are not necessarily rigid and unchanging.<sup>23</sup> The English stereotype of the Irish responded to the social and political context. At times of particular hostility, the English image of Ireland deteriorated noticeably, for example, following the Tyrone rebellion, the Ulster rising of 1641, the Jacobite wars of 1690, the Wexford rebellion of 1798 and so on. In times of relative calm, as for example during much of the eighteenth-century, English attitudes were less negative. Leerssen has argued that this is a pattern which is in keeping with the idea that Ireland could only improve by submitting to a process of civilisation/Anglicization and by accepting English superiority:

'It is as if English authors tend to interpret the quietude of those calmer periods as resulting from the beneficial influence of spreading English civility (thus linking a more positive image of Ireland to an attitude of self-congratulation). Conversely, disruptions of such political lulls in periods of crisis are often interpreted as native Irish wildness and rebelliousness perversely reasserting itself.'<sup>24</sup>

During the first half of the nineteenth-century, the social and political situation was not conducive to any amelioration of English attitudes towards the Irish. Any softening of opinion which may have taken place during the eighteenth-century was destroyed by the events of 1798. The campaign for Catholic emancipation and the activities of Daniel O'Connell did nothing to repair the damage. Ireland was constantly in the news and O'Connell appeared to possess the power of ubiquity (even the lion in Edinburgh zoo was named after him)!<sup>25</sup> Indeed, during the 1830s, when O'Connell's Irish party held the balance of power in the Commons, it might have seemed that the Irish were running Britain. Whilst Irish weakness has been so well rehearsed, Irish strengths have often been overlooked and hence English anxiety less easily understood. Colley uses the fact that England's population

<sup>23</sup> 'Stereos', in Greek, translates as firm or solid. The word 'stereotype' was first used in the printing trade where it described a cast metal plate used to make repeated copies of the same text. Oakes, Haslam, Turner, *'Stereotyping and Social Reality'*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, p. 14

<sup>24</sup> Leerssen, *op. cit.* p. 49

<sup>25</sup> I am obliged to Mr Owen Dudley Edwards for this information.



was four times that of Scotland and Wales combined to help explain national confidence in the eighteenth-century. By contrast, it is instructive to note that in 1801, when the population of England, Wales and Scotland was estimated at 10.6 millions, that of Ireland was 5.2 millions.<sup>26</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth-century, Britain was preoccupied with the problems of urbanisation and industrialisation. Freud noted the high association between expressions of prejudice and periods of socio-economic distress and Curtis has argued that the disorientation caused by modernisation contributed significantly to the anti-Irish attitudes of the English.<sup>27</sup> Data collection by Royal Commissions, Select Committees and statistical societies into living and working conditions, became almost obsessive in this period, as the middle classes increasingly developed a 'siege mentality':

'A feeling very generally exists that the condition and disposition of the working class is a rather ominous matter at present; that something ought to be said, something ought to be done, in regard to it.'<sup>28</sup>

Middle class fear of political discontent, concern for public health and sanitation, and the desire for law and order, made imperative a controlled and remodeled society in the middle class mould of self-help, self-reliance, moral and 'respectable' forms of entertainment and so on. Working class concerns over job security, unemployment, underemployment, and dislocation in the urban environment made them resentful towards Irish immigrants, who entered British society often at the very lowest level, taking the poorest accommodation and low esteemed jobs. In this way they were singled out as a particular target for blame by both the middle and working classes. The Irish became the perfect scapegoats, as the following extract from Faucher's work on Manchester demonstrates:

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<sup>26</sup> Colley, *op. cit.* p. 16. J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain, 1832-51*, (London, Fontana Press, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> See L. P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1971) p.101

<sup>28</sup> T. Carlyle, *op.cit.* p. 151

'For several years the Irish labourers formed the most abject portion of the population, their dwellings were the most dirty and unhealthy and their children the most neglected. It was in the cellars occupied by them that the illicit distillation of ardent spirits was carried on. Misery of every description, fever, roguery, debauchery, and theft were rife amongst them; their neighbourhood was the chosen retreat of vagabonds and criminals, scarcely a day passed without some disturbance or without some serious crime.'<sup>29</sup>

The development of prejudice is thought to be concerned with the projection of the problems of the individual onto the outsider and this can clearly be seen in the English creation of Ireland and the Irish.<sup>30</sup> In demonising the Irish, the governing classes attempted to persuade themselves that the English masses were docile and compliant in comparison. This process was noted by Pearson in the invention of the word 'hooligan' to describe the behavior of rowdy youths during August bank holiday celebrations 1898, which he described as 'most ingenious of late Victorian England to disown the British hooligan by giving him an Irish name.'<sup>31</sup> The contrasts drawn between the Irish and English working classes by English observers demonstrate an unwillingness to recognise the endemic problems within their own society. Noel imagines the English populace in 1837 as 'well fed and freed from anxiety,' and occupying 'neat cottages' surrounded by 'the China rose and the honeysuckle'. The image painted by Lady Chatterton is even more naive:

"In England how exactly in keeping with the character of its sons are the firm and stately forests of elm, beech and oak. They are grand, fine and majestic but they possess more uniformity than sublimity, though their appearance is noble, all around them looks calm, neat and comfortable. The solid country houses, straight streets, small windows, avenues and hedgerows, rounded hills and peaceful valleys, respectfully impart but one and the same

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<sup>29</sup> L. Faucher, *Manchester in 1844*. (Abel Heywood, London, 1844. Reprinted Frank Cass, 1969) p. 28

<sup>30</sup> Stroebe & Insko, *op. cit.* p. 17-18

<sup>31</sup> G. Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, (Macmillan, London, 1983). p.74.

impression - everything looks more useful and sensible than beautiful; as if nature had conspired to give birth to that expressive word 'snug'.<sup>32</sup>

The repressive legislation introduced in Ireland in this period might perhaps be partially explained as an exercise in wish-fulfillment on behalf of the government. No doubt the government desired but dared not pursue an aggressive response to English demands for wider enfranchisement. British heavyhandedness in Ireland might be seen in this context as having a cathartic effect. In addition the stereotype had become so deeply ingrained that legislation was, to a degree, determined by it. The 'natural predilection for outrage' which the Irish seemed to possess, justified the introduction of a national, paramilitary police force of a type which England never experienced. Indeed the changes to the magistracy and the introduction of the Peace Preservation Force first proposed by Peel in 1814, were opposed as 'not English' by Liverpool and Castlereagh. Whitworth, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, responded that this was of no matter, since the changes were meant for Ireland, and even suggested that the proposals might be too good for the Irish.<sup>33</sup> The supposed innate violence of the Irish also enabled the government to explain their insurgency as a natural phenomenon, thus avoiding the necessity of inquiring more carefully into its real causes.

The 1832 Reform Act left all the Irish rotten boroughs and half of the pocket boroughs intact and increased Irish representation by a paltry five seats. The Irish Grand Jury Act of 1837 consolidated power in the hands of local, Protestant landowners, just at the time when English Justices of the Peace were beginning to relinquish their local monopoly of state authority. The Irish Municipal Corporations Act of 1840, coming five years after the equivalent English legislation, had barely the vaguest resemblance to it. Whereas the latter dramatically extended the representation of the middle and upper working classes, the former involved the abolition of most corporations, the emasculation of the remainder and the introduction of a severe £10 franchise qualification. The implication of these differences was clearly that the Irish had neither the ability nor the temperament required for self-government.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> B. W. Noel, *Notes of a Short Tour through the Midland Counties of Ireland in the Summer of 1836 with Observations on the Condition of the Peasantry* (James Nisbet & Co. Berners Street, London, 1837), p. 356. Lady Chatterton, *Rambles in the South of Ireland in the Year 1838* (Saunders & Otley, London, 1839), p. 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> G. Brooker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1970), p. 1 & p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> O. MacDonagh, *O'Connell: The Life of Daniel O'Connell, 1775-1847*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1991), p. 433.

The Poor Law which was eventually introduced in Ireland in 1838, long after the Union, was almost a direct copy of the English Poor Law. It was not, therefore, designed to deal with specifically Irish conditions, most importantly, that the problem of unemployment was more chronic in Ireland, in view of its less varied and developed economy. The Irish Poor Law differed, however, in two ways. Firstly, all relief in Ireland was administered through workhouses, whereas in England only the able-bodied poor received indoor relief. Secondly, the Irish never had any legal right to seek relief, therefore when the workhouse was full applicants were sent away. With only one workhouse on average for 62, 884 persons, the system was totally inadequate. The Irish Poor Law was very much a product of the English attitude that Irish poverty was deserved and was a result of laziness, ineptitude and an indifference to want. This provides the background to the Great Famine from which, Mokyr argues, there is no doubt that Britain could have saved Ireland:

‘It is not unreasonable to surmise that had anything like the Famine occurred in England or Wales, the British government would have overcome its theoretical scruples and would have come to the rescue of the starving on a much larger scale. Ireland was not considered part of the British community.’<sup>35</sup>

One of the most obvious indications of prejudice as an influence on legislation was the failure of the government to honour the promise of Catholic emancipation as part of the Act of Union. The fact that this took a further 28 years to be enacted belied the Union, as did the greatly resented and violently resisted tithes. In both England and Scotland the state revenues went to the church of the majority, but in Ireland, the church of the minority was thus maintained. Such glaring inequalities as these caused O’Connell, as he launched his campaign for Repeal, to ask, ‘Is this a union? Are we the same people, treated in the same manner, and amalgamated with them under the same laws?’<sup>36</sup>

Anti-Catholicism has long remained an important component of English identity. In the first half of the eighteenth-century, the threat of a Stuart invasion and the strength of foreign Catholic powers bolstered hostility towards Catholics. This prejudice was fed by a vast quantity of anti-Catholic propaganda such as Fox’s Book of Martyrs, which confirmed the Protestant destiny of the country. The defeat of Jacobitism at Culloden in 1746, combined with the need to recruit Catholics into the armed forces, led to a softening of attitudes at

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<sup>35</sup> J. Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1985), p. 292

<sup>36</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 16th April 1840.

least at government level. Toleration spread less quickly among the masses, however, and Catholics were on occasion targets of violence and abuse, particularly at times when Britain was at war with a Catholic state, as was demonstrated during the Gordon riots of 1780. This is acknowledged as the last great violent outburst of anti-Catholic feeling in Britain and it is generally agreed that by the nineteenth-century, anti-Catholicism had 'changed gradually and imperceptibly from an aggressive movement to one of dormant passivity.'<sup>37</sup> Anti-Catholicism remained a deeply held prejudice which explained the resistance of many cabinet members to emancipation, as Archbishop John Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin understood:

'Have they not imbibed with their mothers' milk prejudices which nothing but education, of which many of them are destitute, and a free intercourse with Catholics would remove? The nurse told them you were a nation of idolaters, their pastors pointed you out to them as followers of anti-Christ, their books of instruction represented you as the enemies of God, the laws proclaimed to them that you were disaffected and the courts of judgement not infrequently announced it in judgement..how could you be estimated as ordinary men - how could you be considered as religious Christians and faithful subjects?'<sup>38</sup>

Thus the intrinsic anti-Catholic feelings of the English masses remained, despite their lack of organisation. During the 1826 debates on emancipation, over four hundred petitions against were presented in the Commons.<sup>39</sup> In 1829, it is suggested that as many as three thousand petitions were collected. Many of these came from towns with a high proportion of Irish immigrants. Glasgow sent twenty one petitions with 24, 000 signatures, Manchester, despite poor organisation, collected 22, 000 signatures in two days, Dundee sent fifty five petitions and Liverpool's response was reputedly too large for the House of Commons porter to lift.<sup>40</sup> It could be argued that the reaction in these towns had less to do with a residual anti-Catholicism, than with a hostility towards the Irish as cheap competitors for employment, but this does not account for the similar responses in areas which had little or no experience of Irish immigration. Furthermore, the propaganda used made much of the importance of Protestantism in the historical consciousness and identity of the British.

<sup>37</sup> G. I. T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820-1830*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964), p. 8

<sup>38</sup> N. J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life and Times of the Right Reverend Dr Doyle*, (J. Duffy, London, 1861), p. 244.

<sup>39</sup> Machin, *op. cit.* p. 54

<sup>40</sup> Colley, *op. cit.* p. 329



Those signing the petitions may have believed they were part of a native tradition of resistance to Catholicism which could be traced back over generations and included the Scottish Covenanters of the 1630s and '40s and those who took part in the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. This response did not induce serious violence, however. While tolerance was increasing, anti-Catholicism undoubtedly remained an influence, particularly among the poorer, more marginal and less literate.

Working class ill-feeling towards Irish immigrants was strongest in the area of job competition. Research has proved that the Irish did not significantly reduce wage levels nor did they seriously damage the prospects of the native workers; but in examining the extent of prejudice what is true is less important than what is perceived to be true.<sup>41</sup> Navvying attracted many Irish workers and perhaps because of the physical nature of the work and the demanding conditions was also an area of major conflict. A disturbance occurred between English and Irish navvies on the North Midland Railway near Wakefield in June 1839. According to newspaper reports, this was a continuation of trouble which had arisen at Rotherham the previous October with 'the determination of the English to drive the Irish from the line', and had only been contained by the interference and vigilance of the Metropolitan Police who were called in by the directors. Part of the English camp on the Oakenshaw contract near Wakefield had come down to the hut of an Irishman at Warmfield, using 'threatening and disgusting language' and finally issuing notice that unless he and his countrymen left the contract the following week, they had at their command 400 Englishmen to drive them from the district. The Irishmen ignored this warning and were duly attacked and driven away by Englishmen bearing bludgeons and shovels. When they returned to collect their things, the chase was resumed and they were driven into the kitchen garden of Sir Edward Dodsworth, whose servants spirited them away to safety across the Calder to Wakefield. Cheered by this success, the English headed southwards, gathering men as they went, and driving the Irish towards the new viaduct at Oakenshaw. At this point the English numbered 200 to the 30 Irish. One Irishman was knocked into the canal and repeatedly struck on the head with the pick shafts by the English when he attempted to regain the bank. The contractor once alerted to these events consulted the magistrates at Wakefield and brought in both the police and a troop of the 7th Dragoon guards.<sup>42</sup> Another disturbance, on the Chester and Birkenhead railway, was caused by jealousy amongst the workmen, particularly those engaged in the excavating cuttings and raising embankments:

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<sup>41</sup> See J. Williamson, 'The Impact of the Irish on British Labour Markets During the Industrial Revolution', in Swift & Gilley, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, Pinter, 1989.

<sup>42</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15th June 1839



'This animosity (as in other parts of the country where similar works were in progress) had its origin in the mutual 'national' dissent of the English and the Irish labourers - the former entertaining the general opinion that the latter flocked too numerous to their country and by accepting a rate of wages below the English standard, reduced their value in the labour market.'<sup>43</sup>

One of the sub-contractors had engaged Englishmen exclusively. The offended Irish retaliated by beating them off the middle section of the line where they were working. A battle ensued between 300 Irish and 250 English, the former being armed with pick handles, shovels and bludgeons; the latter having only sticks they were soon overpowered. Once more the matter was only resolved with the intervention of the military. Again a party of Irishmen harvesting at Birkham near Ferrybridge were attacked by a number of labourers from the village who beat them off the field and threatened them with serious injury unless they left the neighbourhood immediately. The locals were 'determined not to let any Irishmen work there' and even threatened their employer.<sup>44</sup>

Another possible cause of hostility between the Irish immigrants and the English working classes may have been the presence of Irishmen within the new police force and in the military regiments garrisoned in northern towns. The presence of the army was never popular and the introduction of the new police force was greeted with great suspicion and hostility. In a report on a serious attack on the county police at Lancaster, the Preston Chronicle acknowledged this 'very strong feeling of dislike' which had 'never failed to manifest itself' among the lower classes 'wherever an occasion has presented itself.' During the town races in July 1840, the police were jeered at, before being attacked and driven from the ground. Reinforcements arrived taking the number of police from 4 to 26 but the crowd continued to insult them:

'The prevailing shout of the mob was that they had no objection to their own country constables but they would not be dictated to, insulted and butchered by a set of Irish ruffians! Whatever movement was made by the rurals the populace cried out," Down with the Irish rascals! Down with the rural D\_\_ls!"'<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Manchester Guardian, 16th October 1839 Leeds Mercury, 20th August 1836

<sup>44</sup> Leeds Mercury, 20th August 1836

<sup>45</sup> Manchester Guardian, 29th July 1840

A riot began at Blackburn in August 1830, when a party of Orangemen returning from a procession to mark the king's funeral, began to play the tune 'Croppies lie down' and to wave their flags over the heads of the sentinels as they passed the barracks housing the 87th Irish Regiment of Foot. This behavior was intended to cause offence and it succeeded. Soldiers seized flags from their bearers and silenced the drum with the butt end of a musket. Following this affray, the soldiers were repeatedly annoyed in the streets by cries of 'Croppy' and other insults, until they were provoked into attacking their abusers.<sup>46</sup> This incident concluded without serious injury through the interference of the officers. Only a month later, however, another disturbance occurred. An argument between an Irish soldier and a townsman, in which the former was pelted with stones and called 'a damned Irish rascal', resulted in a serious firearms offence.<sup>47</sup>

Bolton experienced serious conflict between local people and Irish soldiers in August 1831, this time the 18th Royal Irish, a regiment that had 'conducted themselves in a very peaceable manner since they came to the town.' A general fight took place when a number of soldiers were attacked by a gang of inhabitants with apparently no provocation. One of the soldiers asked why there was such ill will in the town against them 'and was answered with a knock-down blow'. In an effort to calm the situation, the officer in charge of the regiment, Captain Huddleston, decided not to press charges, a course of action described as lenient by the magistrate. Huddleston addressed the crowded courtroom saying, 'I wish it to be understood that all I want is that the soldiers may pass through the streets quietly. Our men are Irishmen and they are a credit to the service.' The matter did not end here, however. The following evening the soldiers launched what was described as an unpremeditated attack upon the townspeople assembled to view the various exhibitions which had been stationed in Nelson Square during the fair. A serious riot ensued, lasting for over an hour and only concluding when extra troops were called in and the 18th were returned to barracks. In the aftermath of this incident a meeting was held to adopt measures to prevent a recurrence of similar outrages. Resolutions were passed denouncing the conduct of the 18th specifically and the maintenance of a standing army in general. It was agreed to memorialise the Home Secretary to remove the Royal 18th immediately and to request that no other troops be sent in their stead as a military presence in the town was uncalled for. Indeed, some were of the opinion that if Lord Melbourne did not remove the army, they should take matters into their own hands. Clearly on this occasion the whole idea of a standing army was abhorrent but it could perhaps be seen from Captain

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<sup>46</sup> Manchester Guardian, 14th August 1830

<sup>47</sup> Manchester Guardian, 4th September 1830

Huddleston's rather defensive remarks that the Irishness of the troops was seen as adding insult to injury, in the same way as the nationality of the Lancaster police caused further offence.<sup>48</sup>

Most of the information received about the Irish in nineteenth-century England came through the press and included material concerning both Irish immigrant communities and the Irish in their native environment. Much of the latter was drawn from the accounts of travel writers, some of whose work was also extremely popular in terms of print runs. Several of these were examined for the first half of the nineteenth-century in order to determine their representation of the Irish national character. These authors selected came from widely differing backgrounds but were united in British nationality.<sup>49</sup> Baptist Wriothlesley Noel who visited Ireland in 1836, for example, was a fiercely evangelical, Anglican clergyman, who eventually became a Baptist. As might be expected, his narrative was heavily influenced by his anti-Catholicism. Lady Chatterton, on the other hand, went to live in Ireland following her marriage to Sir William Chatterton of Castle Mahon, County Cork and became a Catholic before her death in 1874. Her Rambles in the South of Ireland was written in 1838 and was so successful that the first edition sold out in a matter of a few weeks. A factor common to all these accounts, however, were the declarations by the authors of their wish to reach the 'truth'. Lady Chatterton announced that her 'principal object in publishing this book, is to endeavour to remove some of the prejudice which render so many people afraid either to travel or reside in Ireland.'<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Binns, assistant agricultural commissioner of the Irish Poor Law Inquiry, who produced his Miseries and Beauties of Ireland in 1837, declared:

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<sup>48</sup> Manchester Guardian, 6th August 1831

<sup>49</sup> B.W. Noel, Notes of a Short Tour Through the Midland Counties of Ireland in the Year of 1836 with Observations on the Condition of the Peasantry, (James Nisbet & Co, London, 1837), H. G. M. Chatterton, Rambles in the South of Ireland in the Year 1838, (Saunders & Otley, London, 1839), W. S. Mason, Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland Drawn up from Communications of the Clergy (Printed by Graisberry & Campbell for John Cumming & Henry Mason, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Browne & William Nichols & Son & Bartley, Archibald Constable & Co, Dublin, 1814-19), H. D. Inglis, A Journey Throughout Ireland During Spring, Summer and Autumn of 1834, (Whittaker, London, 1835), J. Barrow, A Tour Round Ireland, Through the Sea Coast Counties in the Autumn of 1835, (J. Murray, London, 1836), J. Binns, The Miseries and Beauties of Ireland, (Longman, Armie, Brown & Co, London, 1837) T. Reid, Travels in Ireland in the Year 1822. Exhibiting Brief Sketches of the Moral, Physical, and Political State of the Country, with Reflections on the Best Means of Improving its Condition, (Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Browne, London, 1823), C. Otway, Sketches in Ireland, Descriptive of Interesting and Hitherto Unnoticed Districts, (Charles Tait, London, William Curry, Dublin, 1827), Sketches in Erris and Tyrawley, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, William Curry, Dublin, Longman, Brown, London, 1845).

<sup>50</sup> Chatterton, op. cit. p. 3

'...a desire to promote, on the part of the inhabitants of this country, a more familiar acquaintance with the real situation and dispositions of the Irish people and to encourage a more practical sympathy for their sufferings.'<sup>51</sup>

Henry Inglis, visiting the country in 1834, was determined to meet men of 'all opinions, of all ranks and all religions' and to complete his account with personal observation in an effort to reach the truth:

'I believe that truth may be come at by anyone who will take pains to seek it out and who comes to the search with an unbiased mind and before entering upon my journey I would only add that I lay claim to this distinction: I have no purpose to serve, no party to please, no interest to consult. I am in every sense unfettered. To be dishonest, therefore, would be an injury to myself, and this is to the public, the best guarantee of truth.'<sup>52</sup>

Inglis, however, in common with most other British writers on Ireland, was unwittingly fettered by the traditional image of the Irish. Even when a writer attempted to be sympathetic he remained within this frame of reference, in the sense of defending the Irish against the stereotype. Thus Binns on the 'lazy', Irish way of haymaking, explains that this is more to do with the bad system of employment than the natural character of the Irish. Hence, laziness remains an issue because of the stereotype.<sup>53</sup> John Barrow, a professional author and travel writer, visited the sea-coast counties of Ireland in 1835 and saw himself like Inglis as an unbiased observer. He decided early on in his journey against taking a bad road in order to 'avoid catching an early prejudice'. Several pages later, however, his negative feelings are exposed by the language he uses to describe Irish migrant labour:

'....a call was soon answered from that inexhaustible hive which is also pouring, in a constant succession, its swarms into the commercial and manufacturing cities of Great Britain.'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> J. Binns, *op. cit.* p. 7

<sup>52</sup> H. D. Inglis, *op. cit.* p. 6

<sup>53</sup> J. Binns, *op. cit.* p. 8

<sup>54</sup> J. Barrow, *op. cit.* p. ii, p. 33

Inglis found a generosity of character among the Irish but argued that this was also the parent of improvidence. The people to him looked less than industrious; 'more display and less economy' was apparent. He believed that the 'character of the Irish peasant' presented some obstacles to self-improvement: they had no desire for self-improvement unlike the English, they were too easily satisfied, they displayed a lack of truth and their imperfect civilisation led to a high degree of political agitation.<sup>55</sup> Lady Chatterton admired the wildness of the Irish landscape but believed that the Irish people shared this characteristic. She saw them as too easily satisfied, lacking common sense and more violent, more full of party spirit and more angry than any other people.<sup>56</sup> Noel saw the Irish as drunken, ignorant, lying and superstitious. The Halls argued that Irish men were often fierce, recklessly extravagant, dissipated, slavish, captious bigots and declared that 'in no country in the world is the path which divides virtue from vice so narrow.'<sup>57</sup> The statistical account or parochial survey of Ireland compiled by William Shaw Mason from communications of the clergy, was filled with well rehearsed Irish traits; the Irish were described as idle, drunken, negligent, rash, adventurous, variable and bad at manufacture. They were non-progressive because of the remains of barbarous tastes from their ancestors 'which all the arts of civilisation have not been able entirely to remove or overcome'.<sup>58</sup> They were cunning and could be cruel and treacherous; they were naturally shrewd but easily led and ignorant and deficient in mental culture because of their barbarous tongue. They were patient of hardships, prone to superstition and indolent as a result of Catholic holidays. Thackeray's 'Irish Sketchbook' provides a fairly sympathetic account of the country. The 'great big, stalwart, simple Irishmen' is even compared favourably with the brazen and arrogant Scots!<sup>60</sup> The author more than made up for this, however, with the publication of short stories entitled 'Christmas Books' in 1847. These included the tale of 'Mrs Perkins' Ball' with its unforgettable and unmistakably 'Irish' character 'The Mulligan of Ballymulligan'.<sup>60</sup> All previous restraint was cast aside in the creation of this fictional character who appears to possess every possible 'Irish' trait. He is extremely proud of name, family and country, indeed, he claims to be descended from a chieftain although he is very ill-mannered and over-familiar. He is fierce and prone to violence; he carries a big stick and attempts to attack the host of the ball and as a result is described as a 'beast'. He is drunken, sentimental, dishonest, rebellious and foul mouthed. Overall 'The Mulligan' is

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<sup>55</sup> H. Inglis, *op. cit.* p. 155

<sup>56</sup> Chatterton, *op. cit.* p. 19-20 Mr & Mrs Hall, *op. cit.* p.430.

<sup>57</sup> Mr & Mrs Hall, *op. cit.* p. 430.

<sup>58</sup> W. S. Mason, *op. cit.* p. 307

<sup>60</sup> Thackeray, *op. cit.* p. 115

<sup>60</sup> W. Thackeray, *Christmas Books*. London, 1847.



the typically stage Irish character: cunning, stupid, violent, harmless, humorous and blustering.

This constant rehearsal of Irish characteristics over time raises the question of textual borrowings or intertextuality. Leersen uses a short passage from Edmund Campion which 'can be traced like a radioactive isotope from text to text' to demonstrate the extent of this dependence. This is a description of Irish whiskey which he says 'dryeth more and inflameth lesse' than the comparable refreshments of England. This passage became a formula found in nearly all descriptions of Ireland into the eighteenth-century.<sup>61</sup> In this way, just as Said has argued in the case of the constructed Orient, Ireland, because of the persuasiveness of the Irish stereotype, 'was not a free subject of thought or action.'<sup>62</sup> The O'Trigger incident is a case in point. Again, when travel to Ireland became popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, English travellers arrived with a pre-conceived idea of what constituted the 'real' Ireland. Stereotypes became self-fulfilling, as for the English the more genuine Irish were those who best fitted the description. In this way certain parts of the country became seen as more Irish than others. Many nineteenth-century travel accounts begin by declaring their aim to discover the 'truth' about Ireland but the results often suggest that they were in reality looking for material to confirm the standard position. Even when sympathetic accounts of Ireland were written they became defences confined within the context of the stereotype. The extent of textual borrowing in literature produced over several centuries, demonstrates that although stereotypes were responsive to the social and political situation, real changes in attitude were limited. Unable to operate entirely outside the frame of reference established long before in English dealings with Ireland, English writers merely selected from a list of 'benign' and 'malignant' characteristics, to create an 'appropriate' impression. On occasions when less negative images were created it did not follow that negative traits had been rejected or discredited but that temporary confidence enabled a temporary magnanimity. A comparison of passages describing the Irish from a very early period with present day Irish characters in British soap operas would indicate the level of consistency in the British idea of the Irish.

Extracts from the work of authors like Thackeray, Chatterton, Reid, and Inglis were reprinted in the popular press and thus had a significant influence on the English opinion of the Irish. Inevitably, the selection of the material was determined by its entertainment value and therefore curious stories which demonstrated the strangeness of the Irish, or amusing tales which worked on an understanding of typical Irish traits and patterns of behavior, were

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<sup>61</sup> J. Leersen, 'Mere Irish', p. 43

<sup>62</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3



favoured. These stories share certain traits with the later Irishman jokes and it would appear that the Irish provided a great deal of comic anecdote in English newspapers of the early nineteenth-century. Indeed, it would seem that journalists attended Irish court cases to find material specifically for this purpose.<sup>63</sup> Irish characters were invariably introduced as 'Pat' or some equally patronising appellation. Even in court reporting where the individual's name was clearly given, the following descriptions were often preferred: 'Son of Erin'; 'red haired son of Erin'; 'sisters of the sod'; 'a genuine Emerald'; 'a young woman just imported from the sister isle'; 'four young labourers freshly imported from the Emerald Isle'; 'an Irishman of the wild order..inspired with copious draughts of the dear creature, fresh from his native bogs and singing in his rich native brogue.'<sup>64</sup> The Irish 'brogue' was clearly a great source of amusement and attempts to report Irish speech were very common:

'MacDonald was brought up at the New Bailey...protesting that though he was prisint he tuck no part in the row at all, at all.' <sup>65</sup>

'Late on Friday evening an Irishman named Patrick Carroll called in at the house of a brother Irishman in Poland Street where they were having a 'wake' and had not been there long before a man also an Irishman stepped into the house with a bucketful of prime ale. "Here me darlints" says he, "dhrink" and he forthwith served it out to the assembly who it may be supposed were nothing loath. But every good thing must come to an end and nothing more likely than good liquor at an Irish wake. "Och sure", said the Irishman who had brought it in, "sorra a bit shall any one of yees be dhry the night." and off he scampered with the empty bucket which he shortly returned and again it was brimful of ale as at the first."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> For more examples of this see F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prejudice*, pp166-188.

<sup>64</sup> See *Leeds Mercury*, 24th Dec. 1835, 26th Aug. 1836. *Liverpool Mercury*, 15th May 1835, 7th Aug. 1835, 18th Dec. 1835, 2th April 1836. *Manchester Guardian*, 14th Jan 1832.

<sup>65</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 11th June 1836

<sup>66</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 12th July 1837

"Please your worship", said the complainant with a brogue as rich as a brogue need to be, "last night this man and another that lodges with me went out and didn't come back until 12.30pm, an' sure them's very endacent hours for dacent people. So sez I to them when I kem down from my warrum bed to open the door - sez I sure this is no time to be coming in at all and I'd like to know what you mean by it for sorrow a bit of meself understands it. And with that up was this man here who is as quiet a boy as ever lived on the face of the earth or on the wather either for the matter of that, barrin when he gets a sup of the dhrink and then he comes down and abuses me and mine in a way that's quite untellable."

'...Thomas McGinty was charged by Edward McCormick...with stealing his watch. "Plaze yer Wurtship", said the complainant in a brogue that would have hung him without other evidence had Irish birth and breeding been a capital offence, "plaze yer Wurtship, I was in the neighbourhood of Saturday night,- in the neighbourhood of St John's market on Saturday night, I mane,- and I got into a bit of a skrimmage and lost my watch wid some of the boys that was in it."'<sup>67</sup>

Much of this reported speech does in fact reflect patterns of Hiberno-English and part of the reason for repeating it was no doubt for its curiosity value. Mispronunciation, however, was generally reproduced in the press as a way of emphasising Irish ignorance. This is most clearly seen when the same mimicry is used in reports of the 'nate' speeches of Daniel O'Connell, particularly during the campaign for the 'Repale' of the Union.<sup>68</sup>

Amusing tales involving the Irish were often introduced in a way which left little doubt as to their generic quality, as the following remarks taken from the Leeds Mercury and the Liverpool Mercury demonstrate:

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<sup>67</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 18th December 1835.

<sup>68</sup> Leeds Mercury, 1st February 1834.

'Nothing is more amusing than the alacrity of Irishmen in getting into scrapes and the happy naivete and blunders by means of which they endeavour to extricate themselves.<sup>69</sup>

'Things as they are and are to be  
Gloomy looked all our commercial  
affairs,  
When an Irishman meeting his friend on  
the stairs,  
Exclaimed with a very appropriate  
curse,  
If things remain thus, they'll get very  
much worse  
Wasn't it so  
Paddy?<sup>70</sup>

It is clear that Irish nationality was synonymous with stupidity in these newspapers, which, however, were among the most liberal and favourable in attitude towards Ireland. Most hostile papers such as the Liverpool Standard referred to Irish immigrants as:

'Myriads of starving beggars who annually infest the country and eat the bread of the English labourer. Fine peasantry indeed! Rags, filth, ignorance, cunning, treachery, hypocrisy, dishonesty - these constitute the best specimens of the 'finest peasantry in the world.'<sup>71</sup>

It is important to recognise that the press both reflected and reinforced English opinions of the Irish. The following story, taken from the Leeds Mercury, is typical of the 'amusing tale' genre:

'A captain of a man-o-war newly appointed to a ship on the Irish station took the precaution in breaking out of the harbour to apprise the pilot that he was totally unacquainted with the coast and, therefore, must rely on the pilot's local knowledge for the safety of the ship.

""You are perfectly sure", said the

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<sup>69</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 11th June 1831

<sup>70</sup> Leeds Mercury, 27th January 1826

<sup>71</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 6th September 1833

Captain,"you are well acquainted with the coast."  
 "Do I know my own name sir?"  
 "Well mind I warn you not to approach too near the shore."  
 "Now make yourself aisy sir. In troth, you may go to bed if you please."  
 "Then shall we stand on?"  
 "Why what else shall we do?"  
 "Yes, but there may be hidden dangers which you know nothing about."  
 "Dangers! I'd like to see the dangers dare hide themselves from Mick! Sure don't I know every rock on the coast? (here ship strikes) And that's one of them!"<sup>72</sup>

Stories such as the former reproduced the stereotype of Irish stupidity but newspapers also reinforced other aspects of the supposed Irish character such as drunkenness and violence. The Manchester Guardian reported an 'Irish row' on New Year's Day in 1830 as, 'one of those effervescences of Irish temperament so usual among them.' and there are many similar examples: two groups of Irish having a drink 'as is too usual with natives of the sister isle, quarreled over their potations'; 'one of those scenes of brutal revenge for which the natives of the sister isle in this town are remarkable'; 'St George's Road was the scene of one those ceaseless disturbances in which the natives of the sister isle appear to take so much delight'; 'the dispute was soon conducted in pure Hibernian fashion, blows were exchanged and a complete Irish row was the consequence.'<sup>73</sup>

The newspapers therefore selected and used material to confirm the public's attitude towards the Irish. Even within reports of court cases, only the particularly amusing or vicious, that is 'typical' stories, would be selected and, therefore, again the stereotype is self-fulfilling. It would appear at first glance, however, that there is evidence to

<sup>72</sup> Leeds Mercury 11<sup>th</sup> May 1831. Another story, taken from the Manchester Guardian again demonstrates Irish stupidity, the entertainment value of idiocy strengthened by referring to Irish superstition:  
 "The passage into Messrs John Bower & Co coalpit at New Hall near Middleton is 135 yards deep. A short time ago three Irishmen were passing by its mouth when their attention was arrested by a murmuring sound of some water at the bottom. "Sure", said one of them, "and its strange there should be a river in the pit!" The reply to the exclamation was a proposition that one of them should descend to see 'What was to do below!' The speaker, a very young man, placed himself in the bucket but he was too light for his weight to carry him to the bottom. His father, therefore, got in and his weight caused him to descend at a fast rate. The gin began to whirl around with furious ferocity because the other two, with true Hibernian absence of mind, forgot that if they didn't hold the gin their friend would probably get dashed to pieces. Very alarmed they tried to grab hold but were thrown back by the force. Pater went down with great speed but the rope was too short so the full force of the fall was broken and he was thrown into the shallow water. The son was about to dive in to prevent him being 'Drount'. Assistance was soon procured and 'Pater', who lay perfectly still no doubt imagining that he was in a worse place than even purgatory itself was set upon his feet and no sooner found that he was surrounded by creatures of flesh and blood than he cried, "O faith, and I am no worse and only pull me out of the place, bad luck to it, and sure I'll never go down no more."

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 27th January 1830, 7th January 1832, 23rd January 1833, 15th June 1833, 30th June 1837.

substantiate some of the prejudices of the host community. The belief in the innate lawlessness of the Irish, for example, would appear to be borne out by research which suggests that the Irish born were almost three times as likely to face prosecution as their English neighbours.<sup>74</sup> Further consideration of this statistic shows, however, that most of this crime was confined to less serious or petty categories. Indeed, most of it fell into the three inter-related areas of drunkenness, disorderly behavior and assault, and to a lesser extent petty theft and vagrancy.<sup>75</sup> Judging by English standards, therefore, the Irish provided plenty of cause for complaint. Much of this objectionable stereotypical and sometime criminal behavior, however, could perhaps be explained simply by cultural difference and accompanying misunderstanding.

As Roger Swift has noted, in British eyes the terms 'Irish' and 'drink' were synonymous; 'Drink was the Irishman's weakness and drunkenness was the precursor of crime.'<sup>76</sup> Irishmen were seen to be particularly susceptible to drink and their preference for spirits made their drinking more serious. This was implied by the question 'Is there a marked difference in their drinking (Irish) as compared with the English and Scotch?' put to Benjamin Bradley, a former Manchester borough grievance, by the Select Committee on Drunkenness in 1834.

'The Irish I think drink spirits more than the English as a body and we notice the difference; if there be a company of English drinking beer in a beer shop they are good friends if they get drunk together and they can go home with each other and behave with the utmost kindness but if it be a party of Irish drinking whiskey or spirits they will quarrel or fight before they reach home.'<sup>77</sup>

The suggestion that the English always behaved with the 'utmost kindness' to each other when drunk is surely ridiculous and it is much more likely that the Irish provided a convenient scapegoat for such social problems. Irish drinking was different from English drinking, however, in that drink performed and still performs an essential ceremonial and cultural role in Irish society in the same way as it did in many peasant communities. Crofton Croker traveling around Ireland in 1824, commented that it was not uncommon 'to

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<sup>74</sup> Roger Swift, 'Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain', in R. Swift and S. Gilley, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, (Pinter, London, 1989), p.165

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p.166-67

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 167

<sup>77</sup> P. P. 1834, (559) VIII, 315, *Select Committee on Drunkenness*

see a rustic before drinking to spill a small part of his draught upon the ground as a complimentary libation to the fairies.<sup>78</sup> Drink was also important as a way of sealing bargains and in celebrating meetings. The ability to "thrate" someone was very important in terms of proving status:

'if money was in the house, he'd take some of it with him, for fraid that any frind or acquaintance might 'thrate' him; and then it would be a poor, mane-spirited thing, he would say, to take another man's thrate, without giving one for it.'<sup>79</sup>

Drink had a particular importance on occasions such as weddings, christenings and funerals and it was the amount of drinking done on the latter occasions which caused the most outrage amongst English observers. The Irish wake provided considerable curiosity value and therefore had attracted the attention of English observers, as a point of difference, from the first days of settlement. The keen or lamentation over the dead, traditionally sung by the womenfolk was seen as an Irish 'peculiarity' and as such was 'noticed by almost every traveler who visited them.'<sup>80</sup> While the ancient history of such was received as interesting in an antiquarian sense, the continuation of the tradition was not viewed with the same liberality. 'It is curious to observe', said Maria Edgeworth, 'how customs and ceremonies degenerate,

'The present Irish cry or howl cannot boast of much melody, nor is the funeral procession conducted with much dignity ..They gather as the bearers of the hearse proceed on their way, and when they pass through any village, or when they come near any houses, they begin to cry - Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Agh! ... This gives notice to the inhabitants of the village that a funeral is passing, and immediately they flock out to follow it. In the province of Munster it is a common thing for women to follow a funeral, to join in the universal cry with all their might and main for some time, and then to turn and ask - 'Arrah! who is it that's dead? - Who is it we're crying for?'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> T. Crofton Croker, 'Researches', p. 79

<sup>79</sup> W. Carleton, *Traits and Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, p. 88

<sup>80</sup> M. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, p. 100

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101



The fact that the keening was ritual and formulaic rather than spontaneous in nature, therefore, became evidence of Irish insincerity and confirmed the stereotype of the Irish as inveterate liars. The waking of the dead indeed had many ritual components beginning with a particular way of laying out the corpse. Whiskey and tobacco would be provided for neighbours and family who would gather round the deceased and share memories of their life. These occasions could be very lively and indeed this was encouraged with music and games:

'In a short time the house was crowded;  
and maybe there wasn't laughing and  
story-telling and singing and smoking  
and drinking and crying - all going on,  
*helter-skelter* together.'<sup>82</sup>

Connolly has suggested that such behaviour was related to the belief that the spirit of the deceased remained close to home for a time after its death. It was, therefore, seen as necessary to provide an indication of the esteem in which the individual was held and thus hold a lavish party in their honour.<sup>83</sup> This was totally beyond the understanding of English observers, however, who saw these festivities as superstitious, wasteful and a danger to public health and order. The sensibilities of many English visitors to Ireland were offended by what they saw as inappropriate behavior at a solemn time; such was the reaction of the Halls, for example:

'It is needless to say that the merriment  
is in ill-keeping with the solemnity of  
the death chamber and that disgraceful  
scenes are or rather were of frequent  
occurrence, the whiskey being always  
abundant and the men and women  
being nothing loath to partake of it to  
intoxication.'<sup>84</sup>

Reverend Alexander Ross, Rector of Dungiven parish, diocese of Derry, understood the purpose of the mirth and merriment which took place at wakes as a way of showing respect to the dead, but this did not make him any more tolerant of the practice. Indeed, he referred to the tradition as 'absurd' and relayed the following conversation, concerning a person not much esteemed in the country, to give a representation of the value they placed on this 'strange token of respect':

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<sup>82</sup> W. Carleton, *Traits & Tales*, p. 105

<sup>83</sup> S. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland*, Gill & MacMillan, Dublin, 1992, p. 151

<sup>84</sup> Mr & Mrs S.C. Hall, *op.cit.* p. 86

- "Barney, you won't go to Billy \_\_\_'s wake, sure?"  
 - "Is it to Billy! Oh! set him up with mirth at his wake indeed. Let them make mirth at it that think much of him - for my part, let him lie there; the less noise about him the better."  
 - " Ay, ay, neighbour, the less noise about some people the better. I'll warrant it will be but a poor gathering."  
 - " Gathering! It will be no gathering at all. Oh, the devil send jokes to such wakes for me! If there be a bit of decency or fun about it, worth stepping over the threshold for, my names not Barney Kane."<sup>85</sup>

This story was the response to an enquiry by Rev Ross on the subject of wakes and it would be interesting to know his precise questions for the narrator obviously meant, in telling his story, to demonstrate the significance of the wake as an indicator of status and community standing and thus explain the importance of a large 'gathering' or party. Ross, however, sneered at what he saw as a practice designed solely for hedonistic purposes.

Whilst wakes, as an Irish curiosity, were noted and generally frowned upon by English travel writers, their celebration in Irish immigrant communities was denounced by the authorities. Poor Law guardians were loath to pay for pauper burials when they were aware of the money allocated to buying alcohol for the wake, as the beadle of St Giles argued in 1817:

'Last Tuesday a woman died. I went there on Saturday night at twelve o'clock. While I was there the daughter died; the woman had had parish relief. The man came out and said, "My daughter is dead, what can you do for me by the parish?" I said to him, " There are at this time from ten to fifteen gallons before you and more than that. Surely you can bury your daughter and the wife and all?" He said he did not doubt but there was as much as that.'<sup>86</sup>

Wakes were objectionable not only because they were seen to be a waste of money but because of the genuine risk to public health posed by keeping a corpse within an often overcrowded dwelling for several days. This was a particular problem during outbreaks of

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<sup>85</sup> W.S.Mason, *op.cit.* p.318

<sup>86</sup> P. P. Vol. 17, 1817, 484, p. 350

contagious diseases such as the cholera epidemic of 1832. The Irish were believed to be carriers of disease because of their transient lifestyles and their tendency to live on top of one another, as the writings of Kay, Duncan, Engels and Faucher stressed.<sup>87</sup> The tradition of waking a corpse was viewed with particular anxiety and not without reason. The beadle told of a body remaining in the house for seven days after which it could be smelt on the street, causing fever to get into the house from which a further six more died and over eighteen became ill.<sup>88</sup>

Wakes were also viewed as a threat to public order as indeed were all occasions when the Irish gathered together for purposes of enjoyment, celebration and relaxation. The rowdiness which characterised Irish gatherings was made more apparent by the fact that the Irish tended to live together in large communities, thus drawing more outside attention and concern. The large amount of alcohol consumed within Irish communities on Sundays, was believed to encourage their naturally violent inclinations. The constable of St Giles related how the Irish, following their return from Mass at eight in the morning, spent the remainder of Sunday in his parish:

'In the summer it is generally spent in drinking and fighting all day long ..Early in the morning you will see Irishmen quite drunk and fighting with their shelalas which they have got and you will hear nothing but swearing and noise for hours together; at times three or four hundred of the Irishmen will collect together.'<sup>89</sup>

This description bears a similarity with the following report of Sunday in the parish of Tracton Abbey, County Cork in 1814:

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<sup>87</sup> L. Faucher, *Manchester in 1844*, p. 29 'The extensive immigration of poor Irish has inflicted a deadly blow upon the health and comfort of the working classes of Manchester. They congregate together, and form in the town a number of distinct communities, each of which is a nucleus for the generation and diffusion of fever and human miasma.'

<sup>88</sup> P.P., Vol.17, 1817, 484, p.351

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p.363

'The mornings of the Sabbath and holy days are perhaps devoted to the public services of religion but the afternoons are invariably consumed in discussions at the ale house accompanied by the bagpipe and the fiddle or by goaling parties by the young men in the fields and in the evenings regularly terminate in dances and debauchery. It is not unusual for them to meet in clans or factions for the avowed purpose of a battle.'<sup>90</sup>

Fighting, in the same way as drinking, was seen to be an Irish characteristic and this feature of Irish life was used to give an impression of the brutal Irish nature.

'The real fact is that fighting is a pastime and may almost be considered as constitutional among the lower classes of Hibernians, especially when the whiskey is in the head; they are then ready for an affray with their nearest relations, friends or foes..Their very amusements are polemical, fighting is a pastime which they seldom assemble without enjoying, not indeed with iron weapons but with light clubs which they always carry and frequently and skillfully use.'<sup>91</sup>

Both these observers recognised such fighting as a 'pastime' which suggests that this recreational aggression might best be seen as a type of sport along the lines of boxing or wrestling. That it was seen as such by participants is suggested by the fact that it generally took place on a Sunday afternoon, that is, the time set aside for recreation. Another clue to the sporting nature of the Irish fight is that rural aggression was apparently curtailed in Ireland by the establishment of the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884.<sup>92</sup> In the story 'The Battle of the Factions', Carleton's narrative is peppered with sporting metaphors and describes the fight as a game:

'If you lose this game or get your head good humouredly beaten to pieces, why you may win another, or you friends may mollify two or three skulls as a set-off to yours; but that is nothing.'<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> W. S. Mason, *Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, p. 471

<sup>91</sup> J. Barrow, *A Tour Round Ireland*, p. 348, p. 349

<sup>92</sup> Folklore Archive, IML 107, 159, Wexford, Barrow, T. O Ciardha

<sup>93</sup> W. Carleton, *op.cit.* p. 135

Stories such as these were repeated in the British press with an air of disbelief and bewilderment at the strangeness of the Irish.<sup>94</sup> The restrictions and controls which the authorities saw as necessary in urban life were contravened by such unpredictable rural ways and therefore fighting could not be tolerated. The stereotype of the dirty, lawless, brutalised, drunken 'Paddy' was already well established in the mind of the English public before the Irish began arriving in larger numbers from the turn of the eighteenth-century and certain patterns of behavior were expected. Whenever the Irish behaved in the anticipated way they were seen as conforming to type and confirming pre-conceived opinions about them. As a result few allowances were made for them nor were they shown much understanding. The English public were sensitised to certain 'Irish' characteristics which perhaps caused them to judge more hastily and harshly and undoubtedly had some influence on the disproportionate representation of the Irish in criminal statistics.

### **Conclusion**

It may be seen, therefore, that the English colonisers developed a stereotype of the Irish in the earliest days of settlement which was still recognisable in the nineteenth-century and indeed even until the present day. This image was subject to change according to the social and political situation but even in times of high confidence the impression created was negative. This stereotype was necessary to the coloniser, since it provided both the excuse for colonisation and the confidence to undertake such action. The colonised Irish became a foil for English identity to develop against. Differences were exaggerated and the national traits selected and imposed were diametrically opposed. The tenacity of British rule in Ireland demanded the continuation of this justificatory negative image and, thus, both nations became trapped in a vicious circle of mutual misrepresentation. The difficulty experienced throughout British society in dealing with the problems of urbanisation and industrialisation in the early nineteenth-century, did nothing to encourage any generosity of spirit towards Irish immigrants. Anti-Irish feeling flourished in this period as the incomers came to represent the worst fears of all classes. Certain aspects of Irish culture which immigrant communities retained were misunderstood and helped to reinforce existing prejudices. The prevalence of such negative attitudes obviously placed serious limitations on the possibilities for understanding, communication and acceptance. The Irish responded by creating their own image of the English and by manipulating the stereotype of themselves to suit their own ends. This process will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>94</sup> See for example the Liverpool Mercury, 27th February 1832, 8th August 1834

### Chapter Three

#### Understanding Irish Identity: The Irish Self-Image and the English 'Other'



This chapter is concerned with Irish views of themselves and attitudes towards the English. It represents an effort to establish the meaning of Irishness and Irish identity. The remainder of this thesis is about expressions of that identity and difference, displayed in religion, politics and social movements. Certain aspects of British and Irish identity, such as religion, were inherently antagonistic but the question posed here is why differences were perpetuated which might have been eroded or minimised. Why were the elements of Irish tradition, culture and politics, which aroused hostility in the new communities, continued? To understand this it is necessary to examine in depth the background of Irish immigrants in Britain, as Gartner has said:

'The study of an immigrant community requires an understanding of the background which many immigrants consciously and many of them unconsciously were preserving.'<sup>20</sup>

In the attempt to discover and interpret a generic sense of Irishness, however, the significance of the more specific regional differences between the Irish should not be overlooked. A great deal of evidence exists within folklore archives which demonstrates the tendency of Irish people from different localities to distinguish between themselves. A Carlow man, for example, tells how he learnt as a child to identify the Wexford folk by their make and shape of their clay pipes, felt hats and ass-carts.<sup>21</sup> Various nicknames were applied to people from various counties, such as 'scallion-eaters' for the Carlow people, who at one time had specialised in market gardens for Dublin, or the Wexford 'yellow bellies' (perhaps from yellow dress of the yeomen in 1798).<sup>22</sup> The Ordnance Survey letters for Donegal 1835, tell that the natives of Fanaid looked upon themselves as a different people to the Inishowens, whom they saw as 'debased and demoralised', even though Inishowen was divided from them 'only by a narrow arm of the sea about three miles in breadth'.<sup>23</sup> William Carleton commented on the distinctions made between men of different provinces thus:

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<sup>20</sup> L. P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, quoted in J.A Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963), p. 158.

<sup>21</sup> *Irish Folklore Archive*, University College Dublin, IML 462, I, 374, Taken from Patrick Macdonnell, b. 1839.

<sup>22</sup> *Irish Folklore Archive*, IML 407, I, 89-90. Taken from Patrick O Domnaill b. 1888

<sup>23</sup> *Ordnance Survey Letters*, Donegal, TS p. 20, MS p. 42, 1835.

'We have known Connaughtmen as honest and honourable as it was possible to be: yet there is a strong prejudice entertained against them in every other province of Ireland, as is evident by the old adage, "Never trust a Connaughtman."'24

Such distinctions were maintained amongst the Irish in Britain. Mr. Samuel Holme, builder of Liverpool, stated that he was 'unable to hire a Connaught man; he is always spoken of in terms of contempt by the others...and they will persecute him till he quits. The other three provinces consider the Connaught man as a lower caste.'<sup>25</sup> Michael Whitty, police constable of Manchester and himself originally from Wicklow admitted:

'There is a marked difference in the Irish in England. The Leinster men approximate to the English, the people from Munster are less orderly and the Ulstermen are not unlike the Scotch. From the Western counties of Ulster, however they resemble the Connaught men in looks, habits and language. Comparatively few Connaught men stop in Liverpool they generally go on to London. They are a smaller race of men and are very national, always quarrelling with persons from other provinces about the honour and virtue of their own province.'<sup>26</sup>

The testimony of an anonymous shopkeeper of Manchester, mentions a battle which had taken place between the two counties of Leitrim and Roscommon, where the chief part of his neighbourhood originated. This row lasted more than two weeks with both men and women fighting with weapons and fists and only ended upon the interference of the priest, Reverend Hearne.<sup>27</sup> A feud in St Helen's, between the Irish from Leinster and those from Connaught, led to the murder of a Leinster man from County Wicklow. Witnesses stated that the accused attacked the victim with a pitchfork shouting, 'I am a Connaught man you \_\_\_\_ I'll knock your brains out!' It appeared that one public house was frequented by the Leinster men and another by the Connaught men. The defence agreed that 'if there was one period of an educated Irishman's life more than another when he was to be disbelieved, it was when a man of one province comes to speak of the conduct of a man of another

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<sup>24</sup> W. Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, (Volume I, Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe, Buckinghamshire, 1990), p. 427.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>26</sup> P. P 1836, Vol.xxxiv, Appendix G, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74

province.'<sup>28</sup> Yet allowing for these differences, the Irish did recognise each other in a broader sense, as Whitty admitted:

'The people from the different provinces and from the different counties generally associate together. In a general sense they recognise each other as countrymen but still they have all their local prejudices.'<sup>29</sup>

The Irish did not think with one mind, either about their English neighbours or about the meaning of their own identity, but evidence exists which indicates a level of collective consciousness. This chapter will focus on interpreting both this 'general sense' of recognition among Irish immigrants and their reaction towards the English whom they were unable to recognise in the same way.

At what point did the Irish begin to see themselves as such and to distinguish themselves from others around them? Barth argues that the intensity with which individuals stress their ethnicity increases when there is intense spatial, geographical, and social contact between groups.<sup>30</sup> Thus the most isolated traditional group of people is probably the least ethnically defined. In this way the Irish, whilst acknowledging the arrival of the Hiberno-Normans were not forced to examine themselves too closely because their invaders did not challenge them in this sense, becoming easily assimilated into Irish society. As Kiberd states, 'since the first wave of invaders was little more than an uneasy coalition of factions, its members had no very secure identity of their own in whose name they might justify the incursion.'<sup>31</sup> This situation changed with the Tudor invasion and plantations. The Tudors had no wish to be assimilated and since they differed in religion to the native Irish and Anglo-Normans this would not happen naturally. The new colonial policy was ruthless and violent in comparison to that of the Normans, since the intention was to subjugate the whole island. The English in the sixteenth century, therefore, were increasingly seen as the national enemy. The sixteenth century witnessed a Gaelic rebellion of national dimension which threatened to overturn the Tudor conquest and which presented some sort of united front to the English monarchy.

Ireland however was not unified politically. The only cohesive force in Gaelic Ireland was a cultural one. The common factor between rival clans was the intellectual rather than the

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<sup>28</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 18th April 1840.

<sup>29</sup> P. P 1836, Vol. xxxiv, Appendix G, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, p. 21

<sup>30</sup> See F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, (Norway, 1969)

<sup>31</sup> D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, (Vintage, London, 1996) p. 9.

political elite. Irish culture, therefore, was recognised as dangerous and threatening. The colonisers understood the importance of culture in Ireland as a potentially unifying factor between native and Old English, and therefore focused their attack in this area. This hostility provoked a defensiveness that was to remain a feature of Irish identity, a tradition of constantly measuring themselves against only one marker. English denigration of the native Irish culture as uncouth or barbaric was particularly resented. The Gaelic and anti-English cause was mainly asserted in terms of the high antiquity of the Gaelic past, the unbroken line of descent that linked the present Gaels with that past, and the cultivation, literary taste and piousness in matters of religion that had always been the hallmark of Gaelic culture. The work of Seathrun Ceitinn is probably the best example of this. His work was intended as a rebuttal of the misrepresentations of Ireland and the Irish which he had discovered in English texts such as Spenser. He accused the English of being unfairly selective, noting only the negative and blaming the Irish for everything. He compared them to the beetle which occupied itself with dung rather than looking at the summer flowers. The superiority of their culture became a theme which was used to great effect in satires on the ignorant and low born nature of the Cromwellians.<sup>32</sup> In this way the Irish self-image became an inversion of the English stereotype. This early offence caused by the English stereotype never disappeared as the entry under 'Irish' in the Repeal dictionary demonstrates:

‘In England the word Irish is used in familiar parlance to signify anything awkward, blundering, rough, coarse and violent. This is not very civil on the part of our neighbours but it is very natural. They have plundered and oppressed us for centuries and it is in human nature to despise those whom you have with impunity wronged...Apply the term to a people and the world may be challenged to produce such a people! Religious, moral, persevering, patient - oh! How patient! kindly, affectionate, fervently observant of all domestic charities and

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<sup>32</sup> English surnames were the focus of much humour and satires upon them were composed in both English and Irish which emphasised their plebian nature:

The Fairs, the Blacks, the Blonds, the Brights,  
The Greens, the Browns, the Greys, the Whites,  
The Parrots, Eagles, Cocks and Hens,  
The Snipes, Swallows, Pies, Robins, Wrens, etc'

D. Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century*, (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1924. Reprinted 1979), p. 207.

duties, industrious, intelligent,  
disciplined in mind and soul. A nobler  
race never yet existed than the Irish  
people.'<sup>33</sup>

The Jacobite cause provided the political focus for these cultural concerns by which the cultural image became a national one, governing a well defined allegiance to a group identity, defined in political as well as religious and cultural terms or in terms of a common economic dispossession:

'The hetero-image of England that developed in Ireland as the negative corollary of this Gaelic auto-image balanced Gaelic antiquity by English intrusion, Gaelic cultivation by English upstart crassness, Gaelic spirituality by English materialism, Gaelic Catholicism by English Protestantism, Gaelic right by English might.'<sup>34</sup>

What happened shows a high degree of symmetry, each image being a denial of the other's claim to moral and cultural superiority. It is possible at this stage to witness the emergence of certain characteristics deemed specifically Irish. Many of these were refutations of English assumptions; in return for the stupid/barbaric image, for example, the 'land of saints and scholars' emerged. Thus, as has been said elsewhere, the Irish self-image was to a great extent determined by the English stereotype, that is, the characteristics which were emphasised by the Irish were largely rebuttals of characteristics which their rulers imposed on them. The accusation of barbarity, for example, was countered by an emphasis on civility. In this way, Irish identity was, to an extent, an English creation.

Many of the more positive images within the English stereotype are also found within the Irish representations of themselves, which suggests that it was perhaps partly based on observation. The bardic poets were always at pains to emphasise the heroic military valour of their patrons. Indeed, bravery verging on recklessness was deemed a virtue in Ireland. Ireland was an important recruitment ground for the British armed forces, a fact which Daniel O'Connell and his supporters used to stress the unfairness of their treatment. Indeed a placard commonly seen at Repeal meetings carried the slogan 'Gentle when stroked, fierce when provoked', a sentiment which could have been used for The Mulligan!

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<sup>33</sup> *The Nation*, 9th October 1844.

<sup>34</sup> J. Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael: Studies in the idea of Irish nationality, its development and literary expression prior to the Nineteenth century*, (John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1986), p. 447.

With the Counter- Reformation, Catholic and Protestant became very much defined against one another. John Stanton Rochfort, magistrate of Carlow, Kilkenny and Queen's County in 1824, argued that the Irish peasant had a greater attachment to the country than the Protestant, because he conceived of himself and his religion as indigenous to the land, being one of its original inhabitants. All Protestants, whether of English or Irish descent, he identified with the English and the English religion. He saw them as usurpers on the land, who had deprived Catholics of their inheritance and neither the Protestant nor his religion belonged to the soil but to another country:

'I think the hostility which existed from the Irish to the English was at the Reformation changed from Catholic to Protestant, that all those whether of English or Irish descent who continued as Catholics conceived themselves as Irish and all those whether of English or Irish descent who had changed their religion and became Protestants were considered as English and that which was considered as English and that which was considered as being Irish has now come to be Catholic and Protestant.'<sup>35</sup>

The use of the word *Sassanagh* is enlightening in terms of the Irish image of the English. It is interesting to note that the Irish language was unable to distinguish between the words 'Protestant' and 'English' using the term '*Sassenagh*' for both as the Rev Michael Collins explained:

'The true meaning of it is Englishman; there is no Irish term for the Protestant, they first knew a Protestant in the person only of an Englishman and therefore they have identified it with him nor have they any Irish terms for Catholic, they say Catholicky in Irish, but when they contrast a Protestant with a Catholic, Erinech (Irishman) is the term for a Catholic.'<sup>36</sup>

Collins stated that the term was meant as a stigma, a sort of 'objectionable epithet'. Thus the English were associated with Protestantism, Protestantism was seen as hostile and this line of thought did little to engender any sense of fellow feeling.

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<sup>35</sup> Third Report of the Select Committee on the State of Ireland, 1825, (20), VII, 1, Evidence of Mr John Stanton Rochfort.

<sup>36</sup> Select Committee on Crime and Outrage in Ireland, 1825, (20), VII, 1. Evidence of the Rev. Michael Collins.



The equation of Irish and Catholic and the conviction that Catholicism represented the one, true religion, encouraged the Irish to focus on their *moral* superiority. This belief was reinforced by the idea that the Irish were very much maligned; that they were the victims of injustice. Military conquest and colonial rule, if nothing else, gave Ireland the moral victory and this encouraged an emphasis on their suffering and a feeling of perpetual victimisation. Impotence and powerlessness in the face of a militarily superior force, combined with a belief in Catholicism as the one true religion, led to a preoccupation with moral victory and the glorification of failure. The greatest example of this concept was the conscious and intentional sacrifice of the 1916 Rising. Further examples can be found to demonstrate this sense of superior morality and righteousness within the papers of the Repeal movement, a cause which was repeatedly referred to as 'holy' and 'just'.<sup>37</sup> O'Connell himself roused the assembled crowds in Liverpool in 1841, with the stirring idea that 'armed with a just, I would say a holy cause we cannot despair of success.'<sup>38</sup> George Smyth, a Repeal leader in Liverpool, wrote to say that a people 'so numerous, so brave, so moral, so faithful, so sober and yet so insulted as the Irish people' should have no difficulty in obtaining a domestic legislature.<sup>39</sup> Another letter received from Liverpool in 1842, emphasised that 'no agitation can endure which is not founded on justice and on the other hand no agitation is unavailing which is raised against injustice and oppression.'<sup>40</sup> Daniel Hearne confirmed that 'wise political ends' could only be achieved through moral power.<sup>41</sup>

Closely connected with this emphasis on victimhood, is an aspect of Irish identity developed by the poets, which is particularly significant in terms of emigration, that is, what Kirby Miller has described as the 'culture of exile'.<sup>42</sup> The nationalist explanation for Irish emigration was that they were unwilling exiles, compelled to leave as a consequence of English cruelty and mismanagement. In reality, however, the majority of emigrants in this period were exercising a choice to leave and were not compelled in any direct sense. Miller has suggested that there are certain continuities in Irish migration including a consistent equation of emigration and exile, which he explains as resulting from 'a series of interactions between culture and historical experience and their effects on Irish character'.<sup>43</sup> Ireland had a long tradition of political banishment and exile themes such as the comparison with the Israelites, which were to prove enduring. Even the Irish language demonstrates the

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<sup>37</sup> See for example, *Freeman's Journal*, 22nd December 1840, 14th June 1842, 16th April 1840.

<sup>38</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 27th January 1841

<sup>39</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22nd March 1843

<sup>40</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 24th June 1842.

<sup>41</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 4th June 1845.

<sup>42</sup> K. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985) p. 102-130

<sup>43</sup> K. Miller, D. Doyle, B. Boling, 'Emigrants and Exiles: Irish Culture and Irish Emigration to North America, 1790-1922', *Irish Historical Studies*, (xxii, No. 86, September 1980), p. 98.

sorrow implicit in being separated from one's native home, as Miller demonstrates, the word for one who leaves Ireland is *deorai* meaning exile. The poets used two other words *dithreabhach* meaning one who is homeless and *dibeartach*, one who has suffered banishment but no unemotive term equivalent to emigrant exists.

Miller argues that the yearning of many Irish for their birthplace had its basis in the strong attachment of Irish speakers to their native surroundings, topographical, cultural and customary, which can be seen in the poetry and in the autobiographies of Irish speakers.<sup>44</sup> This is certainly reflected in folklore. Storytelling was very important to the Irish peasantry, who were very well versed in the traditions of their own locality - a factor which discouraged movement. These traditions and associations gave many Irish an almost spiritual regard for their native place. The seanchai, or story-teller, would recall all of popular memory and local family history. Communities would be aware of genealogy and able to recite stories of past generations, origins of place names and so on. A story taken from the O'Connor estate in Galway, from a woman born in 1860, told of the items emigrants carried and stated that 'they never, never on any occasion forgot to bring a bunch of shamrock and a sod of turf cut from their parents turf bank,' thus demonstrating the need to retain a physical connection to the land.<sup>45</sup> Another tradition tells of Irish 'exiles' who die in foreign lands:

'They say that if they have a great love for Ireland, an' wish to be buried at home that their bodies will be brought back to Ireland in a fog an' interred in their own graveyards. Usually at night this mist or fog appears an' people should never make it a habit o' being out too late at night in case they'd meet it; for anyone who ever had the misfortune o' meeting it, never did a days good after. They usually tuk a cowld an' died.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> K. Miller, *Emigrants & Exiles*, p. 105

<sup>45</sup> *Irish Folklore Archive*, Ref. IML 485, 1, 218. Kathleen Hurley, Galway, 1938. Turf was a physical connection with their homeland and associated so closely with fire, the symbol of home. The importance of such physical connections are demonstrated in the experience of John Healy in Castleduff, County Mayo, whose aged and infirm uncle resisted efforts to move him to a relative's house because he was the keeper of the fires of four neighbours who had left the area. 'His was the last fire in that part of Castleduff and if it was quenched, quenched too were the last hopes of a return of his closest neighbours. It was the old belief and tradition in the power of fire: where there was a fire there was life and the promise of life. So it was when, one by one, his neighbours left for England or America, there would be a 'wake' house and Jim or Mary Anne, being the last to leave, would take a blazing sod from the last fire in that house, carry it sputtering and sparking across the fields of the hill to place it on their own hearth as part of the rakings. In that way although the emigrant's house was closed and the hearth cold, the fire which for so long blazed there, never really went out. There would be continuity, for when the emigrant came home again, he (or she) would take a blazing sod from Jim's fire which had never gone out and, with the tongs which had carried it, bring the new blazing sod back to the old hearth to relight a new fire.' J. Healy, *Nineteen Acres*, House of Healy, Achill, 1987

<sup>46</sup> *Irish Folklore Archive*, Ref. IML 485, 1, 105-6, Sligo, March 1938, Seán Ó Duibhir, aged 60yrs, farmer from Carrowea.

The Repeal newspapers abound with the letters of 'unwilling exiles' bemoaning their fate. A letter from George Smyth in Liverpool, refers to the physical connection felt by Irishmen for their native home:

'I would lay my hand upon the aged and poverty stricken Irishman and the 'poor old crone', whose only delight is to dwell in the days of their youth, who are yearning to lay their bones in the old graveyard at home - who turn to the Jerusalem of their younger days and have an altar fire upon the cold hearth of their fathers'.<sup>47</sup>

In a letter sent by the Repealers of Stalybridge in December 1840, the writers declared themselves:

'..unwilling sojourners in the land of those whom they cannot but politically regard as their oppressors, that they look back with fondness and regret to the vales and mountains of their birth and the fields of their childhood when they feel that they have been driven by stern necessity to seek in another country that bread which their motherland if properly governed would so amply yield to her numerous and industrious offspring'.<sup>48</sup>

In the words used to represent the letters in the 'Repeal dictionary', the word 'exile' appears predictably beside the letter 'E':

'No nation in the world - save the Jewish - has so large a number of its members in dreary exile as Ireland. The emigrants are exiles by compulsion nearly as much as the multitudes who have been forced to fly because of active opposition to tyranny. The Irishman is not by nature a wanderer. The sweet domestic affections are far too strong in his heart for that. He leaves his own native land only because oppression and misgovernment give him no choice but to do so or starve.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The Freeman's Journal, 30th December 1842.

<sup>48</sup> The Freeman's Journal, 12th December 1840.

<sup>49</sup> The Freeman's Journal, 10th July 1844.

The strength of Catholicism as a unifying force enabled Irish Catholics, from the late eighteenth century onwards, to build a myth of nation based on confessional identification. The concept of the spiritual nation enabled migrants, who often led very transient lives and in some senses belonged nowhere, to create an ideal, inclusive homeland. The identification of Ireland with Israel enslaved by the Egyptians, was a commonly used metaphor. This is significant because it suggests that Ireland, like Israel, was not merely a geographical reference but a spiritual concept which was, therefore, inclusive of those outside its physical boundaries. This comforting imagery combined with an antipathy to Britain and British rule and the hostile reaction they faced in their new homes, produced the myth of exile. While it may be true that had the same opportunities existed in Ireland, many migrants would have chosen to stay at home, it cannot be denied that those who left were exercising a choice. The language of migrants, however, was peppered with such phrases as 'driven from our homes', 'cast out', 'sojourners in a foreign land', and 'despised by the world'.<sup>50</sup>

The idea of the nation as a spiritual entity enabled migrants to be part of the nation without being in it. This was not a great conceptual leap to make, after all they had been outsiders in many senses even when they were within the physical boundaries of the nation. This idea was particularly comforting to the migrant who found some sense of belonging through it, but this ability to belong to one nation whilst living in another placed obvious limitations on naturalisation. It also meant that the immigrants formed a distinct political community, since they remained concerned with Ireland and what was best for it. This political allegiance was reinforced by the regular updates on the Irish situation which were received via the constant influx of friends and relatives. This can be seen in the reaction of the immigrant community to events such as the slaughter of tithe protesters at Rathcormack, Co Cork in 1834. 'Red Rathcormack' was added to the litany of oppression which the Irish were so ready to recite.

Operating in tandem with the culture of exile was the tendency to romanticise Ireland and to look back sentimentally to an imagined Golden Age, as had been the habit of the poets. Such behavior represents a natural reaction to the events and changes over which the colonised had no control and little understanding. It was also necessary for would be nation builders to have some ideal in mind and to be able to legitimise this ideal with a myth of nation, however romantic. Thus, the young Irish Repealers of Manchester wrote to their fellow patriots in Dublin:

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<sup>50</sup> For an example see *The Freeman's Journal*, 16th March 1841.

'when we contemplate on the ...beauty of our native land - her verdant fields, with the bread of life and her flocks so numerous as the bees that encircle our hives, her harbours safe and soundless and yet she is the most impoverished and persecuted country on the face of the Earth.'<sup>51</sup>

In a meeting intended to inspire the newly formed female auxiliary branch of the Leeds Repealers in 1842, a Mr. J. Quinn spoke of 'all the endearing ties' which bound them to their 'beloved Ireland', recalling 'her fertile valleys, her lofty mountains, her noble rivers'.<sup>52</sup> At a meeting of St Anthony's Temperance Society in Liverpool in the same year, the assembled were entertained by the singing of a Mr. Fagan which reminded them of 'golden days on the green sod'.<sup>53</sup> In looking back and interpreting their history, the Irish and English approaches became mirror-images of each other, both seeing things in entirely the opposite way. As Eagleton has said:

'The history of Anglo-Irish relations is among other things the story of a ceaselessly garbled conversation, of partners speaking resolutely past each other, of obtuse or well intentioned misapprehensions. How could it be otherwise when the two parties shared a common history but shared it precisely from conflicting positions, and so with colliding versions of the centuries-old transactions which had passed between them?'<sup>54</sup>

This fundamental difference in interpretation made the subject of history a problem. MacDonagh has noted that Irish and English interpretations of history were at odds not only in the 'colliding versions' of particular events but in their historical philosophy more generally. The English or Whiggish view of history he argues can be described as congratulatory history, the essential element being the belief in progress over time. The Irish idea of history, in contrast, developed 'with an absence of a developmental or sequential view of past events', which he suggests may be connected with Christianity and a sense of timeless justice. He argues that Catholic Ireland created two myths for itself, one being a tradition of 'repetitive heroic violence', the other the idea of an island of saints and

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<sup>51</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 14th June 1842

<sup>52</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 9th July 1842

<sup>53</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 17th December 1842.

<sup>54</sup> T. Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*, (Verso, London, 1995), p. 139



scholars.<sup>55</sup> The Irish concept of history was circular, in contrast to the linear mode of English history. These differences in outlook regarding the past also have much to do with the colonial experience. The coloniser attempts to forget, denying all responsibility for the past, whilst justifying everything in the name of progress. The colonised have to look backwards to find reasons to be proud, or even to invent them in order to remain vigorous. History or memory was also something which could not be taken away by an aggressor and which could be manipulated into a rallying point, as so many Irish nationalists were aware. Poetry memorialised events in localities and established mental monuments which kept passions alive. In the colonial context the Irish were history's losers, having only memories of greatness with which to comfort themselves. The English being history's apparent winners were yet obliged to forget much of the process of winning, lest the victory might appear hollow, or too dearly bought and thus prove them the moral losers. The chasm between the Irish and English nations might perhaps have been more easily breached had, as Elizabeth Bowen suggested, 'the English kept history in mind more' or 'the Irish kept it in mind less.'<sup>56</sup>

Through the song and storytelling traditions which made up such an important part of Irish culture, history was transmitted with an injection of richness and colour less commonly inspired by the written word. It was to this tradition that Corkery turned to uncover the 'Hidden Ireland' or the mentalite of the Gael overlooked by historians such as Lecky, who concentrated on the intellectual life of the Ascendancy.<sup>57</sup> Such sources harked back to a Golden Age before the coming of Cromwell and the New English, when the Irish language and culture held sway and the poet could find work in abundance. Cromwell became the 'baddie' of Irish nationalist history and remains so and the poets looked for salvation from whichever seemed the most likely source, the Stuart dynasty, Bonaparte or Daniel O'Connell. The hero and anti-hero of Irish folklore did not become so by accident, but because of the extent to which their deeds and intentions met with popular approbation.<sup>58</sup> In these poems the historian can trace the reactions and attitudes of the poets, and through them those of the community at large, to events taking place around them; their developing definition of the enemy - the English and the Protestant faith - and witness their rebelliousness and embryonic nationalism.

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<sup>55</sup> O. MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980*, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in R. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, (Penguin, London, 1993), p. 113.

<sup>57</sup> D. Corkery, *op.cit.*, Dublin, 1967.

<sup>58</sup> See R. Uí Ógáin, *Immortal Dan: Daniel O'Connell in Irish Folk Tradition*, Geography Publications, Dublin, 1984.



Poetry was not solely the preserve of elites. Indeed Irish folk poetry, whatever its theme, was generally anonymous and made not by highly educated poets but by the people themselves. In their native tongue they used vivid phrases of great beauty and had what has been described as the power of choosing the perfectly appropriate word with linguistic inevitability.<sup>59</sup> This semi-poetic folk speech made the creation of poetry a natural process. Folk prayers created by the people were expressions of a lay liturgical movement of a people most of whom were poorly educated. Such prayers were recited for a particular occasion or purpose, for example, as a charm to ward off evil. A tradition of extempore and verse speaking in times of high emotion such as the *Caoine* at a Wake provided a structure with which the Irish peasantry could respond to stress. The difficulty of translating such important cultural tools into English, encouraged the Irish, both within and without Ireland, to maintain their traditions and language. The following extract, relating to the work of Eoghan Rua O Suilleabhain, demonstrates how the poem, once composed, soon became part of the oral tradition of the people:

'The song was not always written down.  
Many's the lively poet who could not  
write; he had a good memory and when  
he memorised his own composition he  
would render it or sing it; or someone  
else would sing it on his behalf, and if it  
was a good song the people would soon  
have it by heart, and eventually it would  
be written down.'<sup>60</sup>

Leersen argues that by the eighteenth-century, poetry had become part of a more popular tradition less distinguishable from the oral folk tradition of anonymous poetry and song.

<sup>59</sup> B. O'Cuiv, *A View of the Irish Language*, (Stationary Office, Dublin, 1969) p. 47

<sup>60</sup> B. O Madagain, 'Functions of Irish Song in the Nineteenth Century,' *Bealoideas*, lml 53, 1985, p. 140ff The author provides various examples of this, like the tradition of the Kerry poet Diarmaid na Bolgai Ó Sé (1755-1846) who as an old man with a dying wife, went to the house of the priest to ask him to come to anoint her, making his request in verse:

'Do shiubhluigheas treasna gach baile 'o Dhruing indiu  
Ag triall ar an Eaglais mbeannuighthe, príomh an chirt;  
Ag siubhal abhaile ata mo shean-bhean chríona anois,  
A's cuir séala beannuighthe an anama 'o Chríost uirthi.'

'I have walked across every townland from Druing today  
Coming to the holy Church, the prime of right;  
My aged wife is now going home  
And put Christ's holy seal on her soul.'

Or the story of Seamus O Domhnaill composing a death song for his son who was drowned in 1811. The rest of the family had grieved and keened for several days but Seamus remained silently sitting on the rocks beside the shore where his son's body had been found. One day his younger son saw him there singing snatches of song and crying and ran to his uncle believing his father to have lost his mind. His uncle reassured him however saying 'He has made it. He'll get relief now. It wasn't singing he was at all but making a song. He'll recover now. He has released the pent-up emotion.' Music had an important function in that it belonged to the culture of the society, expressed its values and enhanced the sense of belonging, as Alan Lomax has said, 'the primary effect of music is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolises the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work - any of these personality shaping experiences.'

Before the decline of the Irish language, the Irish people would have been generally considered as illiterate although in another sense they were highly literate, for they spoke a 'vivid and highly cultivated language' and possessed memories 'stocked with the native oral literature of their ancestors'.<sup>61</sup> Songs would frequently be preceded by an explanatory story. Topical songs were very popular, focusing on a particular event, often a tragedy evoking an emotional response, for example, the anonymous 'Raiseanna Bhaile Atha hUlla' concerning the massacre of tithe protestors at Rathcormack. Here the poet acts as mouthpiece of the community and the song becomes a symbol which singer and audience can identify with and thus give indirect expression to their feelings.<sup>62</sup> The symbolic function of song is demonstrated by the fact that ballads relating to events and individuals as distant as Cromwell and the Wexford rising are still commonly sung today.

The Irish, therefore, had a very detailed grasp of their history and the government was quick to recognise this and the potential danger inherent within it, as the Select Committee report on Crime and Outrage (1825) demonstrates. One question asked of the contemporary experts was 'to what extent the prevalent discontent was attributable to the recollection of ancient times?' The responses all acknowledged the existence of historical grievances dating back as far as the rebellion of 1641. Witnesses such as George Bennett K. C. of Kildare and King's County, argued that property confiscations dating back to the first Tudor plantations remained a grievance and that the people still believed they would regain their property. Not only did the ordinary people feel keenly that they had been wronged in the past but, he argued, they were well aware of their present disabilities under the penal laws. Major George Warburton stated that the result of such beliefs was that the peasantry 'are averse to the English connection as far as I know.' When pressed further about the reasons for this hostility he said that the Irish were impressed with the idea that the English settlers in Ireland were possessed of their property. When asked if there was any remembrance of the old wars in Ireland he replied:

'Their ballads and songs are upon that subject and as far as tradition goes I think them generally so'<sup>63</sup>

W. Becher of North Cork was asked if the lower class were sufficiently intelligent to understand the nature of the laws relating to Catholics to which he responded:

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<sup>61</sup> B.O Cuiv, *A View of the Irish Language*, Dublin, 1969, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> B. O Madagain, *op. cit.*, p. 185

<sup>63</sup> *Select Committee on Crime & Outrage* 1825 (20) vii, I, Evidence of Major George Warburton.

'I think they know there is a material distinction made by the law between them and their Protestant neighbours and this was mentioned very often by them.'<sup>64</sup>

According to the Rev. Michael Collins parish priest of Skibbreen :

'They have traditions and tales about the massacre and execution of priests and priesthunters and the difficulty they had heretofore in hearing mass, they were obliged to resort to bogs and morasses for that purpose. They have also recollections of liberty and what they the privileges they enjoyed formerly compared with their present degraded state...They talk of Elizabeth frequently, they talk of the invasion of the Spaniards in 1601 and of Lord Tyrone coming down to assist them and of Lord Mountjoy and the massacres of that period...They have Cromwell's Bridge and there are many places that are pointed out by the name of Cromwell they know even the individuals that are descended from the soldiers of Cromwell.'<sup>65</sup>

Collins stated that he had always found among the people a great number of persons who were very tolerably acquainted with the old times and what had happened during the former disturbances of the county. In his frequent travels through the country, wherever he met with old castles and abbeys he had always found persons who could tell him the histories of those places and that history was always connected with the ancient wars of Ireland.

Those who gained any education would have received it in the 'hedge schools' which had developed in the absence of any other legitimate means of Catholic education under the penal laws. These formed the majority of schools in 1829 being 9, 352 in number.<sup>66</sup> The reading material used in these schools was a great source of concern for observers such as William Carleton:

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Evidence of W. W. Becher.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Evidence of Reverend Michael Collins.

<sup>66</sup> D. G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, (Croom Helm, London, 1982, Routledge, 1995), p. 148

'The matter placed in their hands was of a most inflammatory and pernicious nature as regarded politics and as far as religion and morality were concerned nothing could be more gross and superstitious than the books which circulated among them.'<sup>67</sup>

Concern was also expressed with regard to the schoolmasters employed by the community whom Carleton suggests were often involved in suspect political organisations and who helped to spread rebellious ideas among the youth. Dowling refers to one Munster teacher who fitted this description:

'He praises the Milesians, he curses 'the betrayer Dermot' abuses the 'Saxon strangers'-lauds Brian Boru- utters one sweeping invective against the Danes, Henry VIII, Elizabeth, Cromwell, 'The Bloody', William 'of the Boyne' and Anne; He denies the legality of the criminal code; deprecates and disclaims the Union, dwells with enthusiasm on the memories of Curran, Grattan, 'Lord Edward', and young Emmett, insists on Catholic emancipation, attacks Peelers, horse and foot, protests against tithes and threatens a separation with the United Kingdom!....before congenial spirits he talks downright treason.'<sup>68</sup>

Would-be leaders of the Irish community attempted to manipulate them by using history. Feargus O'Connor, for example, sought to curry favour with the Irish in Manchester, by performing a 'representation of the trial of Robert Emmett', which he advertised with a placard reading, 'Arise ye sons of Erin, your brave patriots are gone.'<sup>69</sup> Daniel O'Connell also saw the value of history as a political tool and arranged his 'monster meetings' for Repeal at places with particular resonance in Irish tradition, such as Tara and Mullaghmast.<sup>70</sup> Gavan Duffy speaking about the young men inspired by The Nation newspaper in the Young Ireland movement noted that:

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<sup>67</sup> W. Carleton, Traits and Tales of the Irish Peasantry, (Colin Smyth, Buckinghamshire, 1990, Vol 1), p. 313.

<sup>68</sup> P. J. Dowling, The Hedge Schools of Ireland, (London, 1935), p. 111-112.

<sup>69</sup> The Freeman's Journal, 22nd December 1840. This appeal fell on deaf ears as the Irish community, under the influence of O'Connell, felt unable to display any approval for Emmett's violence.

<sup>70</sup> Tara was chosen as a site to hold a monster meeting because of its status as the residence of the ancient kings of Ireland. Mullaghmast was popularly remembered as the place where the chiefs of the O'Mores were treacherously slaughtered by English colonists.

'The country which had been conjured up before their imagination, was the old historic island, the mother of soldiers and scholars, whose name was heard in the roar of onset on a thousand battlefields, for whose dear love the poor homesick exile in a garret or cloister of some foreign land toiled and plotted and at length hid his weary head and died – the one mother country which a man loves as he loves the mother who held him to her breast. They dreamed not of becoming Repeal Wardens but of becoming martyrs and confessors, for to understand the effect produced by the passion of nationality on an imaginative and aspiring people, we must have recourse less to the history of political factions, than to those sublime movements of faith and enthusiasm by which barbarous tribes were transformed into Christian nations.'<sup>71</sup>

The aim of The Nation was to encourage the growth of national feeling among its readership, or in its own phrase, to make them 'racy of the soil'. To this end membership cards were designed for the Repeal movement which 'blossomed into poetry and history':

'The member's card was adorned with the ancient national flag 'The Sunburst'. On each corner of the card was printed the name of a great battle won by the Irish with the date of the event... To the right and left were columns bearing inscriptions specifying the area and resources of Ireland and commemorating the free states which were inferior to her in wealth, population and territory and ending with a refrain very natural under the circumstances but which afterwards became the subject of grave judicial rebuke - 'And yet she has no Parliament'. The Associates' card contained more elementary teaching and the Volunteers' was embellished with great soldiers and statesmen.'<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> G. Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland: A Fragment of Irish History, 1840-50 (Gill & Son, Dublin, 1884), p. 62

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.80

At a meeting of Repealers in Stockport in 1840, a Mr Richardson, addressing the assembled for some time on the importance of agitating for a Repeal of the union, spent some considerable time tracing the history of Ireland in order to demonstrate that the Irish 'were a warmhearted and generous people who had always been distinguished for their bravery in the field'.<sup>73</sup> Mr Duffy of Liverpool explained on a visit to the LNRA in Dublin, that, in returning to Ireland after twenty three years, he felt a renewal of the spirits which he had inherited from his father 'from whom he had heard the atrocities which were inflicted on Ireland'.<sup>74</sup> The memory of suffering was a common legacy in Ireland, judging by the way phrases such as 'centuries of persecution' appeared so regularly in nationalist rhetoric and by their constant rehearsal of historical grievances.<sup>75</sup> In discussing the bigotry inherent in Liverpool corporation's education policy, for example, O'Connell drew an analogy with the behavior of the Cromwellian powers in Ireland with the important difference that the latter period 'was imbued with blood'.<sup>76</sup> At a Repeal meeting in Bolton in 1843, an English man named Mr Leach perceptively summed up the historical outlook of the Irish with the comment, 'Irishmen have been taught to look upon themselves as an oppressed nation and that Englishmen were their oppressors'.<sup>77</sup>

History did not, however, belong solely to the Catholic community but was equally important in shaping Protestant identity, as is evident in the tradition of 12th July processions. There were tensions in the Protestant community, notably between Presbyterian and Episcopalian but these were less important to their self-definition than their shared aversion to the Catholic community. The Irish Protestants were preoccupied with maintaining the Williamite settlement and with demarcating their relationship with England. Theirs was a culture fraught with contradiction and insecurity; being conscious but resentful of their dependence on Britain they shared to an extent the anti-Britishness of their Catholic neighbours. Theirs was also a colonial experience which they attempted to compensate for in their architecture, for example, which as Foster has noted, was intended not only to rival but to surpass that of London.<sup>78</sup> Both cultures shared a sense of insecurity. Catholics were witnessing the sublimation of their language and culture in the rising tide of Anglicisation, which ironically presented them with the credentials for political advancement. Protestants, as

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<sup>73</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 5th December 1840.

<sup>74</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 16th March 1841.

<sup>75</sup> See *The Freeman's Journal*, 9th June 1841, 20th January 1842, 14th February 1842.

<sup>76</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 22nd November 1842.

<sup>77</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 4th July 1843.

<sup>78</sup> R. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, (London, 1988), p.174



an increasingly embattled minority surrounded by the dispossessed, experienced a siege mentality and an uncertainty about the exact measure of support they could expect from Britain. Both cultures responded to this insecurity in a similar way, though at different times, by asserting a sense of superiority towards each other and to the British.

The relative stability of the greater part of the eighteenth-century and a growing disillusionment with the metropolitan power disposed the Anglo-Irish to acquire a sense of Irishness. The Gaelic world was collapsing around them and therefore this change in attitude carried less risk. The Anglo-Irish became increasingly dissatisfied at what appeared to be a growing English contempt and indifference to their position, particularly in the metropolitan government's punitive economic policy for Ireland. Their frustrations and grievances were summed up in their claim to equality of the two kingdoms. For, they argued, Ireland was never a conquered state, but an equal kingdom. Ireland had freely received Henry II and proclaimed him their king and therefore, the Irish were freemen under their own institutions. The denial of England's right to impose commercial restrictions, inspired boycotting campaigns such as that of the Kilkenny horsemongers, who in 1784, resolved that any shopkeeper caught selling foreign goods should be held as an enemy, or the Coombe association who pledged themselves to the exclusive use of Irish manufactures, threatening to tar and feather any member who disobeyed.<sup>79</sup>

The political dissent of the Anglo-Irish community in the eighteenth century, particularly the work of Molyneux and Swift, influenced Irish nationalism and identity by emphasising the unfairness of Ireland's treatment and the failure of colonial government. The work of these brilliant individuals nurtured a sense of confidence, which bolstered the Catholic Association and reinforced O'Connell and the Home Rulers. The Repeal movement in particular, was very much influenced by eighteenth century, Protestant thinking, which exposed the coloniser's lack of honour in dealing with Ireland and confirmed the concomitant impossibility of trust.

The mellowing of the Protestant community was unable, however, to withstand the tensions of the 1790s. Falling living standards among Protestant weavers in the north created a more aggressive brand of Protestantism, which Catholics sought to protect themselves from in the Defender organisation. Tithe agitation involved many secret organisations devoted to direct action, and hardened Catholic feeling towards their Protestant neighbours. Protestant suspicion was increased by the Catholic Relief bill of 1793 and Fitzwilliam's viceroyalty in 1795. With the formation of the Orange Order in the 1795, the situation grew even more

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<sup>79</sup> R. McDowell, *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800*, (Faber & Faber, London, 1944), p. 87

tense. The fear of a French invasion fostered an increasing sense of paranoia throughout Irish society. The United Irishmen, founded in 1791 by a small group of urban intellectuals whose radicalism was sufficiently strong to bridge their religious differences, traversed the country, manipulating the peasantry with exaggerated claims of a forthcoming Orange attack. By such methods, the great majority of Catholics were brought under the influence of the system by the end of 1797.<sup>80</sup> The government adopted draconian measures, on the advice of local magistrates, to deal with the growing crisis but the lack of discipline in the army and the presence of so many Orangemen among the yeomanry, exacerbated the situation and led the peasantry to believe the government was supportive of the Orange movement:

'The peasants still retain the most rancorous antipathy against the Orangemen and every fresh act of outrage adds fuel to their passive and keen desire for revenge. Being made to believe that those outrages are committed on them under the authority and sanction of the government, their antipathy against it and against the Orange party is exactly the same, for they conceive on this account the government to be the real source of all this suffering.'<sup>81</sup>

When the Rising did take place in 1798, it quickly abandoned its radical rationale and developed into a sectarian war. The horrific atrocities committed on both sides, left an inheritance of sectarian animosity in the shape of Defenderism and the Orange institution. From the late eighteenth-century, Irish identity was to develop along rigid confessional lines. Indeed, O'Connell's success in politicising the peasantry and building an Irish Catholic nation, had much to do with the bitterness and suspicion occasioned by events at the turn of the century. The descendants of the radical secret societies of 1798, were still very much alive and working on a quite separate agenda to O'Connell.<sup>82</sup> One contemporary explained the festering nature of these memories:

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<sup>80</sup> H. Senior, *op. cit.* p. 81

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139

<sup>82</sup> More will be said of these groups and their British branches in a later chapter.

'With the younger part of my tenantry, I feel as if I had lost all influence; they will not converse with me as they used. They listen to me when I speak of the dangers of unlawful meetings but invariably turn to their work without a reply. The poor fathers of some of them remember the horrors of former years sometimes speak of their children in a tone of sorrow- 'I tell you there's something that's not right among them boys, they are grown so dark and getting together in holes and corners and when I speak to them about the ould times and the bloody year '98 and the hard summer that came afterwards to frighten 'em tis that only sets 'em wild entirely!' The poor old man did not know that in memory hatred and revenge are only one remove from horror.'<sup>83</sup>

Popular enthusiasm for the emancipation campaign, can be explained partly by these expectations, which became intertwined with the millennial atmosphere prevalent at the time. The prophecies of Pastorini, predicting the overthrow of the 'heretic' in 1825, were in mass circulation in the early 1820s.<sup>84</sup> It can be seen from contemporary government investigations, that the people often believed that the Catholic Association was to have some role in delivering them from Protestantism. Francis Blackburn, when asked by the Select Committee on Crime & Outrage if belief in the prophecies contributed to outbreaks of violence, replied:

'Not alone, but it keeps the minds of the people in an unsettled and distracted state and unquestionably at this moment there are other matters tending to perpetuate the state of distraction and discontent..the public speeches of a body called the Catholic Association in Dublin are very injurious. I believe also that the attacks upon the church establishment and the tithes do give a currency and effect to the prophecies of Pastorini besides being themselves a distinct and substantive cause of irritation.'<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Mortimer O'Sullivan, *Captain Rock Detected*, (T. Cadell, London, 1824).

<sup>84</sup> Witnesses to the S.C. on Crime and Outrage, testified that copies of these prophecies were being found in all areas of the country. Warburton, for example, stated, 'I do not think there is an instance to be found among the lower class of people who do not speak of it ( the prophecy) in their common conversations at their work and on other occasions when they are assembled together. They do not speak of it in a secret way but as a thing known,'

<sup>85</sup> *S. C. on Disturbances in Ireland, 1824*, evidence of Francis Blackburn esq

The rabidly anti-Protestant atmosphere was exacerbated by the progression of the Protestant evangelical crusade, which emphasised the importance of the personal recognition of the saving power of God and revered the Bible as the source of revelation. Catholicism was criticised for teaching false doctrine and for discouraging individual study of the scriptures, and the evangelicals devoted themselves to the propagation of the Gospel in order to save the souls of the ignorant Irish. Schools were established where Bible reading formed a large part of the days learning and printed material in Irish was made available in order to reach a wider audience. This activity caused a great deal of resentment among Roman Catholics and played no small part in persuading the clergy to give their full support to O'Connell.

Within this atmosphere of increasing sectarianism, historical antipathies were perpetuated by continuing inequalities upheld by the law, which provided the immediate background for those leaving Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century. Just as the Irish were very aware of their history and historical grievances, so were they conscious of the disabilities they continued to labour under. In his evidence to the Select Committee on Crime and Outrage (1825), W. W. Becher stated that a great many in his area of north Cork, took an interest in the law and in public matters because they believed themselves to be in a state of degradation.<sup>86</sup> Sergeant Lloyd of Cork supported these statements. In his experience the feelings of religious distinctions were gaining ground among the lower orders, who were very anxious for political news. Richard Griffith, a civil engineer in the districts of Cork, Kerry and Limerick confirmed that the feeling of dissatisfaction amongst the lower orders because of their inequality before the Law, was 'very great'. They found them a great practical inconvenience and they were 'very sensible that they were debarred the privileges the rest of His Majesty's subjects enjoy'.

'They feel that they have no chance of getting forward in the state and instances occur very often to satisfy them that if they had the same privileges as the other classes of His Majesty's subjects, they would have similar chances of promoting their objects in life.'<sup>87</sup>

The Irish were fully sensible that they did not enjoy equal opportunities and this was a matter of conversation among them. The political disabilities meant that they did not have the same confidence in those in power and, therefore, had little faith in the law.

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<sup>86</sup> P. P. 1825 (20) VII, I, *Crime and Outrage in Ireland*, Evidence of W. W. Becher

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Evidence of Richard Griffith

'They look on themselves as disfavoured, almost as aliens, in the country having no common interest with the more favoured part of the community...they look upon themselves as contrasted with the Protestants of their own rank and as degraded compared with them. They feel themselves insulted and are sensible of what they consider the insolence which the Protestant peasantry feel on account of the privileges they enjoy.'<sup>88</sup>

This rejection of the authority of the state manifested itself in the various methods of protest, which J.C Scott has grouped together as 'weapons of the weak'. He argues that too much emphasis has been placed by historians on peasant rebellion, whereas the more significant resistance came on an everyday level. This point has been taken up by Ranajit Guha:

'To rebel was indeed to destroy many of those familiar signs which he had learned to read and manipulate in order to extract a meaning out of the harsh world around him and live with it. The risk in 'turning things upside down' under these conditions was indeed so great that he could hardly afford to engage in such a project in a state of absent-mindedness.'<sup>89</sup>

It made more sense, therefore, to resort to less direct action, such as 'footdragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage' and so on, all common features of colonial societies.<sup>90</sup> Such conduct required little planning or co-ordination, avoided direct confrontation and therefore minimised risk, representing a form of self-help. Scott argues that when such individual acts of protest are supported by the general community, such resistance may be seen as a social movement:

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Evidence of Reverend Michael Collins, Parish Priest, Skibbereen, Co.Cork

<sup>89</sup> R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter Insurgency', *Subaltern Studies II*, (O.U.P, Oxford, 1983), p. 1

<sup>90</sup> J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, (New Haven London, Yale University Press, 1985), p. 29.

'Seen in the light of a supportive subculture and the knowledge that the risk to a single resister is generally reduced to the extent that the whole community is involved, it becomes possible to speak of a social movement.'<sup>91</sup>

Scott argues that by reference to the culture that peasants fashion from their experience, 'their offstage comments and conversations, their proverbs, folksongs and history, legends, jokes, language, ritual and religion', it is possible to determine the degree to which they accept the social order. The glorification of bandits and poachers would suggest that the law is seen as an imposition. The popularity of such reading material as 'Frenzy the Robber' or 'Irish Rogues and Rapparees' in Ireland was of great concern to the government, especially when it was suggested that these texts were being used in schools.<sup>92</sup> Such a rejection of authority, as Eagleton has noted, represents the failure of the colonial government to realise the imperial project of hegemony in Ireland.<sup>93</sup> Military superiority generally enabled the colonisers to deter open rebellion, but had no power to counter the silent resentment of the people. Conquest may have existed over the body but was less effective with the mind and the emotions. In failing to achieve hegemony colonial government was forced to undertake a kind of guerrilla warfare in which 'daylight sycophants became moonlight marauders'. This is a common feature of slave and colonial society. The works of Soyinka, Achebe and Appiah discuss the fact that the colonisers were never as fully in control as the people allowed them to appear:

'We all experienced the persistent power of our own cognitive and moral traditions: in religion, in such social occasions as the funeral, in our experience of music, in our practices of the dance and of course in the intimacy of our family life.'<sup>94</sup>

Such practiced disingenuousness had its effect on Irish character. Michael Whitty, the superintendant of Liverpool's nightly watch and himself a native of Wexford, made an insightful comment on the Irish migrants in his city of adoption, recognising the effect of the Irish atmosphere on the Irish character:

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>92</sup> See *S. C. on Crime & Outrage, 1825*, evidence of Justin McCarthy, Magistrate Co.Cork

<sup>93</sup> Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger. Studies in Irish Culture*, (Verso, London, 1995), p. 28

<sup>94</sup> K. A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa and the Philosophy of Culture*, (London, Metheun, 1992), p. 7-8. See also C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (London, Heinemann, 1958) and W. Soyinka, *Five Plays*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1958).



'The English are generally more manly and candid and less disingenious than the Irish. This I attribute to the habits of both; the Irish peasant has always lived under a kind of local despotism, to obviate the effects of which, it is necessary that he should call into exercise a certain degree of cunning and mental expertness.'<sup>95</sup>

The clearest example of resistance in Ireland, of the type Scott discusses, can be seen in the various agrarian terrorist groups, labelled together as Ribbon societies. They used typical tactics such as anonymous letters, arson, attacks on cattle, in defiance and rejection of the right of law. All these groups 'adhered to an alternative conception of law and government' to the extent of establishing their own kangaroo courts.<sup>96</sup> These were 'alternative systems of 'justice', which the peasantry were driven to develop by the failures of the official system'.<sup>97</sup> These groups will be examined in depth in a later chapter. Contempt for the law was not, however, restricted to such organisations. Francis Blackburn, a barrister in Limerick, testified that people often preferred to take the punishment of wrongdoers into their own hands rather than resort to legal means, as they were 'not disposed to assist the administration of the law'. The Irish also demonstrated their contempt for the law by the support they provided to those under trial:

'There is a natural disposition in Irish people to save a prisoner no matter who he is or what he is charged with;'<sup>98</sup>

Rev John Keily, Parish Priest of Mitchelstown, County Cork, stated that there was 'a pretty general feeling among the common people in Ireland that there was little justice to be had for them.' This feeling, he explained, was demonstrated by the common Irish adage that 'a word in the court was better than a pound in the purse', that is, 'that nothing was to be done but through interest'. According to Father Keily this phrase was 'almost in every person's mouth in the county' when he arrived there.<sup>99</sup> The theme of peasant alienation from an oppressive legal system was emphasised repeatedly in the work of Gerald Griffin who stated in his novel, *The Collegians*, published in 1829:

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<sup>95</sup> Report on the State of the Irish Poor in GB p. 21

<sup>96</sup> R. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 292

<sup>97</sup> T. Dunne, 'Murder as Metaphor', in MacDonagh & Mandle, *Ireland & Irish Australia: Studies in Cultural & Political History*, Croom Helm London, p. 75

<sup>98</sup> *Select Committee on Crime & Outrage 1826*, p. 47, Evidence of Maxwell Blacker K. C. Cork & Tipperary

<sup>99</sup> *Third Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland 1825*, Evidence of Rev. J. Keily.

'The peasantry of Ireland have, for centuries, been at war with the laws by which they are governed. Even guilt itself, however naturally atrocious, obtains a commiseration in their regard from the mere spirit of opposition to a system of government which they consider as unfriendly. There is scarcely a cottage in the south of Ireland where the circumstances of a legal denunciation would not afford, even to a murderer, a certain passport of concealment and protection. To the same cause may be traced, in all likelihood, the shrewdness of disguise, the closeness, the affected dullness, the assumed simplicity, and all the inimitable subtleties of evasion and of wile which an Irish peasant can display when he is made to undergo a scene of judicial scrutiny, and in which he will frequently display a degree of gladiatorial dexterity that would throw the spirit of Machiavelli into ecstasies.'<sup>100</sup>

The Law was seen as partial, and threatening, and so it was necessary for the Irish to protect themselves against it. Language difficulties increased their sense of alienation, a point made well by Griffin, in Danny Mann's refusal to reply to his accuser's questions in English. The peasantry evolved survival techniques to help them through the legal process, including flattery, feigned stupidity, a familiarity with legal terminology and the avoidance of the solemn oath by such means as kissing the hand rather than the Bible:

' the English reader may perhaps be surprised at the extent of Thady's legal knowledge, and at the fluency with which he pours forth law terms...The nature of processes, ejectments, custodians, injunctions, replevins &c. &c. are perfectly known to them and the terms are as familiar to them as any attorney.'<sup>101</sup>

The Irish continued to use flattery, legalese and feigned stupidity when necessary in England, and this was noted by their hosts. For example, in an article entitled, 'An Irish Defence', a 'genuine Emerald' charged with having caused an affray:

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<sup>100</sup> G. Griffin, *The Collegians*, Belfast, 1992, p. 253

<sup>101</sup> M. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988), p. 108

'..put himself into an oratorical attitude and addressed the bench somewhat to the following effect, "Plase your honour's worship and glory! I don't know at all, at all whether I've misdemaned myself in such a way or not in regard of the sup of drink.'<sup>102</sup>

Another Irishman accused of being drunk and disorderly responded to the charge 'with great emphasis and a strong brogue:

"Plase yer honour I didn't do a ha'path in the universal world whatsoever. (laughter) I'm unable to do anything, I could not walk or run if you give me one hundred pounds, for the matter of that a thousand guineas, for I lost the caps off both my knees in scaling a battery." Pat seemed to be in a fair way to detail the whole of his 'feats of broil and battle' but was cut short in his narration by magistrates ordering him to pay 2s 6d<sup>103</sup>

Playing the fool or the wit and eliciting laughter also had its serious side however. In being humourous and impudent, these Irish were appealing to the better side of the Irish stereotype and were thus consciously presenting themselves in a less threatening light. An example of this is Lawrence Hanlin who was arraigned in Leeds, on a charge of selling illegally smuggled whiskey. The charges against him were dubious, in that although he had been found in possession of the spirits, he had not been seen selling it. Perhaps this gave Hanlin the confidence he needed to rise to the occasion. The examination 'caused much amusement, in consequence of the loquacious powers of Pat, who 'showed much ingenuity in conducting his defence.' In questioning the arresting officer, Hanlin's glee is obvious:

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<sup>102</sup> The Liverpool Mercury, 7th August 1835

<sup>103</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 23rd September 1836

Prisoner - "What sort of bottle was it?"

Witness - "It was a three sided octagon bottle."

Prisoner - "A three sided octagon (do you say) bottle was it?" (Laughter)

Witness - "It was and I suppose it would contain four ounces."

Prisoner - "Well mine was a doctor's bottle, so your out this time." (Renewed laughter).....

Magistrate - "What did the bottle contain?"

Witness - "Whiskey, to the best of my knowledge."

Prisoner - "To the best of your knowledge! I think ye've no right to come here to spake in knowledge; if that's all ye've got to say why, I think it amounts to nought at all."

Witness - "I have no doubt whatever as to the contents of that bottle."

Prisoner - "No doubts haven't ye, but I think ye ought to have much doubt, when ye didn't taste the bottle."

Witness - "Your character, I dare say is well known."

Prisoner - "I dare say not so well as yours: I don't know who you are, but raly, I think you ought to have brought some testimonials, for certainly, it appears to me to be a very suspicious one....I raly think honest folk should be very careful what they do, when such is in the town: such characters, in my opinion gintlemen, ought to be exposed and held up afore the papple."<sup>104</sup>

This manipulation of the stereotype was a common feature of Irish dealings with English. Evidence drawn from court cases is significant, since these occasions comprise much of the very limited spoken evidence drawn from the peasantry. It is on these occasions particularly, that the Irish can be seen using the image created for them by the English to serve their own purposes. To be underestimated is, to an extent, to be empowered, as Thady Quirke was aware in Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent, a novel which carried this warning to the Anglo-Irish.<sup>105</sup> There was often more to be gained by adopting the stereotype than by challenging it, as Kiberd has said:

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<sup>104</sup> The Leeds Mercury, 20th April 1836.

<sup>105</sup> This is brilliantly demonstrated in Carleton's tale of 'Phil Purcell, the pig-driver'. In this story Phil tricks an English gentleman into buying a pig he has no need for by his flawless portrayal of the simple Irishman. In the conclusion of the tale we are told that nothing could surpass the Englishman's contempt for the sense and intellect of Phil; 'nothing could surpass it but the contempt which Phil entertained for him.' W. Carleton, Traits and Stories, p. 423.

'Many found it easier to don the mask of the Paddy than to reshape a complex urban identity of their own. An art of fawning duplicity was perfected by many who acted the fool while making shrewd deals which often took their rivals unawares. The Irish in England were compelled to 'read' their host country's codes in their attempt to study its defects for it was from their defects that the English derived their way of seeing and not seeing them. '106

The following passage from the pen of Samuel Lever shows the imaginative evasion of a peasant to avoid taking the oath of allegiance because of a scruple of conscience and the insulting address of the inquiring agent. His witty replies were purposely 'never to the purpose':

"Are you a Catholic?"  
"Am I?"  
"Are you not?" said the fellow.  
"You say that I am" was the answer.  
"Come sir answer - What's your religion?"  
"The thrue religion."  
"What religion is that?"  
"My religion."  
"And what religion is that?"  
"My mother's religion."  
"And what was your mother's religion?"  
"She tuk whiskey in her tay."  
"Come now I'll find you out cunning as you are" said the agent, piqued into an encounter of the wits with this fellow whose baffling of every question pleased the crowd, "You bless yourself don't you?"  
"When I'm done with you I think I ought."  
"What place of worship do you go to?"  
"The most conveynient."  
"But of what persuasion are you?"  
"My persuasion is that you won't find out."107

The 'mental expertness' seen here, suggests a suspicion and hostility to officialdom which was noted by many visitors. This behavior, 'calculated to gain time and evade inquiry, or

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106 D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 25

107 S. Lover, *Handy Andy, A Tale of Irish Life with 24 Illustrations on Steel by the Author*, Frederick Lover, London, 1842, p. 221

having that brought home to them which they wish to avoid', became part of the 'species of ready wit, mingling volatility and a rich vein of humour' which the Irish were famous for in England.<sup>108</sup> In reality it represented both a defence mechanism against the threat of authority and a way of exacting revenge by deliberately irritating or misleading officialdom. This reinforced the self-image of the Irish as superior in comparison with the low-born English, who appeared to take everything at face value and to be unaware of the subtleties of language and behavior.

On occasion, the Irish made use of the English stereotype in the most outrageous and cynical way. The Repeal movement, for example, in an attempt to win British support for their cause, confirmed the popular fears of the invasion of hordes of unskilled, uneducated and unhealthy Irish. A domestic parliament, they tried to persuade the English working class, would keep all these undesirables at home. Another example is provided in the records of a trial for a murder which had allegedly taken place at St Helens in April 1840. On this occasion, the Irish defence lawyer, a Mr Murphy, asked the jury to 'make allowance for the..untutored, uneducated Irish nature, provoked and excited in those quarrels which were so well known to prevail amongst the lower orders of his countrymen.' The judge rejected the suggestion that 'there was to be one law for the Irish and another for the English' was as unacceptable as the idea that 'there should be one law for the cool tempered and another for the hot tempered!'<sup>109</sup>

Such evidence is valuable as it demonstrates the Irish awareness of, and frustrations from, English opinion of them. Abundant material exists to show the prejudice suffered by the Irish. Irish immigrants responded to this openly and indignantly through organisations such as the Repeal movement but also employed more duplicitous means. A story printed in the

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<sup>108</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 16th September 1825 The contemporary press provided other examples of such as Shelagh's answers to the county magistrate:

"What's gone of your husband Shelagh?"

"What's gone of him your honour's worship? Faith and he's gone dead!"

"Ay pray what did he die of?"

"Die of your honour, he died of a Tuesday."

"I don't mean what day of the week but what complaint?"

"Oh Complaint, your honour, Faith and its himself did not get time to complain. Oh aye he died suddenly. Rather that way your worship."

"Did he fall down in a fit?" - No answer from Shelagh

"He fell down in a fit perhaps?"

"A fit, your honours worship, why no not exactly that, he fell out of a window or a door, I don't know what they call it."

"Ay, ay and he broke his neck?"

"No not quite that your worship "

"What then?"

"There was a bit of string or cord or that like and it throttled poor Mick."

"And pray for what did he suffer?"

"Suffer your worship (weeping) Faith only for embellishing (embezzling) a trifle that he taught was his own, but his master said it was not and so they swore away his precious life and that's all for Mick's as innocent as the babe unborn."

<sup>109</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 18th April 1840



Manchester Guardian in 1837, told how Irish tradesmen in British cities were forced to change their names in order to acquire respectability.<sup>110</sup> Mr McGuinness, a subcontractor on the Hartlepool and Grantham Railway, wrote that 'the great mass of Englishmen are hostile and opposed to the Irish people.' He then gave details of the 'insults and outrages inflicted by the lower orders of the English upon these Irishmen.'<sup>111</sup> The ladies of Manchester wrote to say that they were 'the victims of natural prejudice and sectarian hatred.'<sup>112</sup> The Repealers of Ashton-under-Lyme described the Irish as 'too often the sport of ignorance, maligned and belied by a hireling press and ridiculed by the Law/Church pulpit.'<sup>113</sup> George Smyth of Liverpool wrote of a fire in the city at a commercial property belonging to an Irishman named Doran. This gentleman had been arrested on suspicion of insurance fraud, an outcome which Smyth believed was influenced largely by his nationality. Smyth's national feeling was further insulted by the case for the defence, which felt obliged to convince the court that the witnesses called by their client were not of Irish nationality and were, therefore, by implication trustworthy:

'I trust that this simple but convincing proof (not to mention others I might adduce) of the anti-Irish feeling of the people of this country, will not be lost upon my poor countrymen in Liverpool and elsewhere and that it will have the effect of keeping them out of even an English court of justice.'<sup>114</sup>

Contempt for the law, however, did not stop the Irish from applying to it. Visitors to Ireland regularly remarked on the litigiousness of the Irish peasantry. Blackburn's description of Irish attitudes to the law prompted the Select Committee to ask whether the common people regarded the law as made for them or against them, all his previous evidence pointing to the latter conclusion. Blackburn's reply indicated that the Irish attitude to the law was more sophisticated than an outright rejection:

'I can only say that they are very ready in all disputes with and claims against each other to appeal to the law. There are immense numbers of civil bill suits sometimes in Limerick they amount to 1500 or 2000 at a sessions.'<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 8th February 1837.

<sup>111</sup> Freeman's Journal, 5th December 1840.

<sup>112</sup> Freeman's Journal, 22nd December 1840.

<sup>113</sup> Freeman's Journal, 15th September 1840.

<sup>114</sup> Freeman's Journal, 10th October 1842.

<sup>115</sup> Select Committee on Crime & Outrage, 1825, p. 27, Evidence of Francis Blackburn

The emphasis here is on the words 'each other'. In the case of a Crown prosecution the people's disregard for the government would display itself, unless the victim had transgressed 'the peculiar notions of honour and faith held among the secret societies of the peasantry', for instance by informing.<sup>116</sup> The availability of such a powerful weapon was too tempting to many feuding Irish and the court houses were packed with petty suits. The law appears to have been seen as an aggressive and negative force; a weapon to be used against one's enemies rather than a shield to protect the innocent.. It was to be used as much in attack as in defence. Just as with their manipulation of the stereotype, the Irish could complain about injustice and ill-treatment suffered under the law but would avail of it when it suited. The irony was that they rejected the law and its basis, on the one hand, but felt no conflict in using it to secure their own ends. The lessons they learnt as defendants against the Crown, such as an understanding of the mechanisms of the law, they could turn to their advantage as plaintiffs. The tactics which Griffin mentions were employed by peasants in court to demonstrate their antipathy and resistance towards the government were also learnt as a means of defence. According to Edgeworth 'every poor man in Ireland..is, besides his other occupations, occasionally a lawyer':

'They all love law. It is a kind of lottery, in which every man, staking his own wit or cunning against his richer neighbour's property, feels that he has little to lose and much to gain. 'I'll have the law on you, so I will!'- is the saying of an Englishman who expects justice. 'I'll have you before his honour' - is the threat of an Irishman who hopes for partiality.'<sup>117</sup>

The tendency of the Irish to appeal to the law even on petty matters was also a feature of life in the new communities. One particular case noted in the press because of its ridiculously petty nature, will serve as an example. An Irish egg-vendor named Margaret Burn charged her countryman, 'a rough looking' pig driver, with having caused the destruction of her 'marchandise' by allowing his pigs to run on the footpath. The magistrate, deciding they were both in the wrong, (she for putting her eggs on the footpath in the first place and he for allowing his pigs to go on there) asked the woman to provide an estimate of the damages. Her answer that six eggs were broken amounting to a total of

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<sup>116</sup> T. Dunne, *op. cit.* p. 76

<sup>117</sup> M. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, p. 109 She continues, 'astonishing is the number of those, who, though they are scarcely able by daily labour to procure daily food, will nevertheless, without the least reluctance, waste six or seven hours of the day lounging in the yard or hall of a justice of the peace, waiting to make some complaint about - nothing...they make no scruple of telling a justice of the peace a story of an hour long about a tester (sixpence) : and if he grows impatient, they attribute it to some secret prejudice which he entertains against them.

'thrippence' caused much amusement in the courtroom. The prisoner, however, claimed that the amount was even more paltry, "sure, she told me in dhe street when I refused to pay her that it was only 2d an' she'd a let me off for dhat if I'd a give it to her.' He eventually agreed to pay 3d and the 'complainant went away rejoicing.'<sup>118</sup>

A hostility towards authority was also very much in evidence within the Irish areas of British towns. Indeed if, as has been suggested, the Irish were selected for particular harassment this hostility might have been even more keenly felt.<sup>119</sup> The Irish were renowned for their aggression and for responding as a community when their way of life was threatened and their neighbourhoods were intruded upon. It would appear from contemporary newspaper reports that the Irish were very much on the defensive, being ready to leap to the assistance of their countrymen at a moment's notice. The deputy constable of Manchester declared that:

'The Irish are very easily hurried into violence even by a single one of their countrymen and at a moment's notice; five minutes will bring together a thousand people at any time.'<sup>120</sup>

A young man found operating a still was arrested in the Oldham Road district of Manchester in early 1830, but was rescued by a crowd of people after setting up a 'loud Irish cry'.<sup>121</sup> Again during riots on St Patrick's day of the same year a ringleader was arrested and later rescued after 'he set up a cry peculiar to the Irish which brought the whole body to his assistance.'<sup>122</sup> The following year a group of Irish weavers attempting to force a 'turn-out', were driven away until they raised a 'cry of 'Philliloo' and were reinforced by many more of their countrymen'.<sup>123</sup> Even when the Irish were fighting among themselves they resented the interference of the authorities, as two arresting officers found in Manchester in July 1840, when the angry crowd turned on them instead.<sup>124</sup>

The authorities were obviously and understandably apprehensive about entering Irish neighbourhoods and usually went in force. Ten policemen were required to take up two boys gambling on the street in Manchester in 1840, although a crowd still followed and

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<sup>118</sup> The Liverpool Mercury, 23rd March 1838.

<sup>119</sup> R. Swift, 'Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain', in Swift & Gilley, The Irish in Britain, 1875-1939.

<sup>120</sup> P. P. 1836, Vol. xxxiv, Appendix G, Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, p. 75, Evidence of Joseph Sadler Thomas

<sup>121</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 2nd January 1830

<sup>122</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 20th March 1830.

<sup>123</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 15th October 1831.

<sup>124</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 18th July 1840.

knocked several of them down.<sup>125</sup> Bailiffs trying to collect a levy in Newtown, Manchester, were obliged to call for reinforcements twice, eventually involving the entire police force and a number of dragoons and were still unable to prevent the building being razed to the ground by the angry tenants. The news report of these events expressed a hope that the culprits would be brought to justice, as 'the lawless and outrageous conduct of the lower classes of Irish in this town is becoming perfectly intolerable and we fear it will be necessary to make some terrible examples before they will be induced to yield a proper submission to the laws.'<sup>126</sup> Following an attack on the police in the town in March 1836, the judge declared his determination to 'protect the police in the discharge of their duty and to put down combinations which seemed to exist against them in certain quarters'.<sup>127</sup>

The association in the Irish mind of Englishness and Protestantism must have created a level of unease among Irish immigrants settling in the northern English towns. The polarisation of Irish society along religious lines meant that each party presented the other as the enemy. To the Irish Catholic, Protestantism was represented by the landlord, the judiciary, and the Orange Order, that is the instruments of oppression. The perceived partiality of government to this privileged, influential and bigoted minority created a political identification which equated Orange with Tory. The challenge to faith which migration presented, can be seen in an anxious letter from a father in Waterford to his son in England in 1820:

'The situation of the times forces me to write this once, in the first place mind your religion as an indispensable duty you owe your creator, your salvation is the only thing requisite, if you lose your God you are lost forever, your religion and the Sacrament are your only prospect of happiness. I need say no more but I am afraid you have troublesome times ahead of you...you were confirmed in Killala. I wish you could prevail on your two brothers to get confirmed the first opportunity. Your eternal salvation is my chief concern.<sup>128</sup>

A soldier of the 8th Hussars on a drunken rampage through Hulme, in Manchester in 1831, allegedly threatened the residents with his sabre and the words, 'Blast you bloody heretics,

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<sup>125</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 30th September 1840.

<sup>126</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 6th March 1830.

<sup>127</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 25th March 1836.

<sup>128</sup> Leeds Diocesan Archives, uncatalogued letter in Bishop Briggs' Letterbook 17th April 1820.

I'll cut you into mincemeat'.<sup>129</sup> A meeting of the 'friends of scriptural education in Ireland' held in Liverpool in 1837, was infiltrated by large numbers of angry Irishmen who heckled the speakers mercilessly. While the evangelical clergy congratulated themselves for having brought the word of God to the 'poor perishing souls' the Irish returned 'we don't want it' and challenged the speakers to give proof of their allegations regarding the Irish clergy.<sup>130</sup>

Irish Catholics were not alone, however, in arriving in Britain with biases and prejudices inherited from the sectarian environment of nineteenth century Ireland. The experiences of Hugh M'Neile, the militant Protestant clergyman from Ulster who made such efforts to manipulate party feeling in Liverpool, were no doubt shared by many of his countrymen:

" He hated Popery. He was born and bred to hate it. He hated it through life and he would continue to hate it until death."<sup>131</sup>

The presence of self-conscious Irish Protestant communities in the northern towns is very hard to find, which in itself is significant. It would be very much counter to their interests, as regards housing and employment opportunities for example, to emphasise their Irishness over their Protestantism, especially in areas with large Irish population. It seems safe to assume, therefore, that they were willing and able to merge into the host population. Senior maintains that many of those joining British Orange lodges, which were being established from 1798, were Irish Protestants who had joined British militia regiments or who had come to Britain in search of work:

'The Protestant Irish were a minority within a minority which might well desire to keep itself apart from the Catholic Irish by forming separate Protestant societies in which English and Scots were welcome. In this manner they might hope to protect themselves from the hostility of Catholic Irish immigrants and at the same time to win the approval of the English who held the Irish in contempt.'<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Manchester Guardian, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1831

<sup>130</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1837

<sup>131</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 24th April 1849.

<sup>132</sup> H. Senior, op.cit. p. 152.



The system of patronage operated by the Orange Order would undoubtedly have been beneficial to incoming Irish Protestants. While there are difficulties in finding reference to ordinary working class Irish Protestants, it is known that in Liverpool in particular there were a significant number of Irish Protestant clergymen, presided over by Hugh M'Neile, who were responsible for the bitter 'No Popery' campaigns.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, the extreme opinions of the Irish Protestant clergymen led them into serious disagreements with their English colleagues.

Unfortunately for the British authorities, both Protestant and Catholic Irish had a highly developed sense of symbol, which they used as a means of identification and a rallying point. Ó Cuiv notes that in 1803 many of those attending the execution of Robert Emmet were described as wearing green favours to display their sympathy with the patriot, and he suggests that it was the United Irishmen who first promoted the colour. The colour green was commonly mentioned by the bardic poets and Ó Cuiv argues that it is most likely to have become associated with Ireland as a reflection of the verdant nature of the Irish landscape. The activities of the Repeal movement repeatedly demonstrate the importance of symbol. At a Repeal dinner in Liverpool in 1841, consisting chiefly of Irishmen of the more comfortable class of operatives, 'a large banner with the arms of Ireland was suspended from the centre of the ceiling and various other standards and flags with appropriate national mottoes and inscriptions hung around from the upper tier of boxes - among these the genuine Irish greeting of 'Cead mile failthe' met my eyes in more than one place'.<sup>134</sup> A reception for Daniel O'Connell in the same place had 'beautiful devices' hung over the tables with inscriptions including 'Erin go Bragh', surrounded by shamrock, 'the emerald isle' with the device Erin and the harp and a painting of St Patrick.<sup>135</sup> In keeping with tradition, at a Liverpool dinner for repeal wardens in 1845, 'the room was decorated with emblems of nationality. A full length portrait of Daniel O'Connell was placed over the chairman's seat, which together with likenesses of Sarsfield, Brian the Brave and the devices of 'the sunburst' and others gave great brilliancy to the scene.'<sup>136</sup> A Repeal dinner at the Queen's theatre, Christian Street Liverpool, attended by O'Connell was 'admirably filled up, decorated with festive wreaths, flags and emblematic devices of Ireland,

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<sup>133</sup> F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence the Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914: An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), p.48. This group included the Reverends Thomas Nowlan, McConkey, Joseph Baylee, Dr Butler, William Fallon, and Fielding Gould.

<sup>134</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 27th January 1841.

<sup>135</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 29th January 1836.

<sup>136</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 8th November 1845



'the Irish sons of freedom' a spirited and truly national society, contributed their flags and banners towards the transformation of the scene into a national character worthy of the occasion. Immediately over the stage and fronting the great body of the company were suspended two beautiful flags, the one representing the chieftain of repeal in the attitude of an orator and the other 'Sarsfield the brave'. From the ceiling over the pit were also suspended two waving banners, the first a pictorial representation of the Irish wolf dogs with a motto significant enough in these times, portentous for English legislative supremacy namely 'gentle when stroked fierce when provoked' and the second the Liberator, robed as Lord Mayor of Dublin and around the frontings of the boxes were various tastefully executed devices emblematic of events in Irish history. A temperance band.....played national airs during the evening.'<sup>137</sup>

On O'Connell's release from prison in 1844, the Irish quarters of towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire became awash with the colour green, for indeed, the Liberator himself was the most obvious symbol of Ireland and the hope of her regeneration. His popularity amongst the migrant population can be seen by the vast audiences which he drew in every area with a significant Irish presence. When he arrived in Manchester in September 1835, he was accompanied, in procession, to Stevenson Square by the Hibernian Society and 'many thousands of others'. O'Connell's delayed arrival in Liverpool in January 1836, caused great disappointment 'inasmuch as the various Hibernian societies and several of the trade societies had made preparations for meeting him at his landing and escorting him to his hotel. When he did arrive at 7am next day, the early hour was not enough to deter two to three hundred people from meeting him. By the time O'Connell was due to speak from the Adelphi, 15 000 to 20000 people had assembled.'<sup>138</sup> The same enthusiasm greeted the temperance reformer Father Theobald Mathew.

The Irish sensitivity to symbol was frequently demonstrated in the new communities. In July 1844, a riot took place in Bradford, after a marching band of Orangemen had played a provocative tune entitled 'The Boyne Water'.<sup>139</sup> One of the band members, under

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<sup>137</sup> The Freeman's Journal, 16th September 1843.

<sup>138</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 29.1.36.

<sup>139</sup> The Nation, 24th July 1844.

examination, explained that it was played merely because it was a merry tune but later admitted it was associated with William of Orange. The Judge, in summing up, stated that it had been played with the intention of 'exhibiting some sort of a triumph over a certain class of the inhabitants of Bradford' and was bound to excite feelings. A 'traditional' Orange procession to St John's church in Manchester, involved participants displaying orange colours on their breasts. One publican in Jackson Street hung out a green flag in response, but withdrew it at the request of police.<sup>140</sup> Despite the best efforts of the police 'one or two assaults did take place arising from the display of party colours and the carrying of dangerous weapons'. An Orangeman arrested for assault stated in his defence, that 'he had struck a man but it was because he had attempted to tear orange rosettes from the breasts of two Orangemen.' Further violence took place when an Irish man named Rankin adopted 'a representation of William III, of 'glorious memory'', as the sign above his beershop. A crowd assembled armed with sticks and stones on the very evening the sign was erected and a number of his windows were broken, causing Rankin to remove the sign.<sup>141</sup> At St Helen's in July 1838, 'the colours of the Orangemen were torn to ribbons and the poles from which they were suspended were broken about the heads of the fellows who carried them.'<sup>142</sup> The procession of a sick club in Wigan in the same year provided yet another occasion for violence. The immediate cause of this outburst was the mule which led the procession, which was 'dressed in a fantastic manner in Orange ribbons.' A witness explained that it was upon the sight of the mule that the rush was made, because the Irishmen saw what was intended, that a gross insult was offered. Those who incurred the wrath of the offended Irishmen were, according to the magistrate, 'the morally guilty party', as their action in dressing up the mule was intended 'to create pain in the minds of others'.<sup>142</sup>

### Conclusion

At the outset, the stated intention of this Chapter was to attempt to establish the meaning of Irishness and Irish identity. Why were elements of Irish tradition, culture and history perpetuated by the migrant community when they inspired such antagonism? Identity is inevitably contrastive by nature and the Irish constructed themselves largely in opposition to the English. Imputed characteristics were often refutations of characteristics which were imposed on them; for example, when labelled as barbarous, the Irish would stress their civility in response. In this way, the Irish image can be seen as a joint creation. This

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<sup>140</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 18th July 1835

<sup>141</sup> The Liverpool Mercury, 20th July 1838.

<sup>142</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 17th August 1838.

Chapter has demonstrated the strong sense of place felt by many Irish and these ties to home were strengthened for migrants by the constant stream of friends and neighbours arriving from Ireland with the latest news. Contemporary witnesses testified to the strong historical awareness of the Irish which is confirmed by their song and storytelling traditions. Evidence also suggests that Irish Catholics were very conscious of their unequal position before the Law. They demonstrated their rejection of English authority in many and varied ways; some simple, such as the defiant maintenance of their traditions and non-cooperation with the authorities; some more complex, such as the secret societies with their alternative systems of justice.

Irish Protestants were also developing a stronger self-awareness in this period. Events surrounding the American War of Independence and the trade restrictions placed on them by the metropolitan authority, distanced them from their traditional protector. At home the 1798 Rising, the frenzy aroused by the prophecies of Pastorini and the Evangelical Crusade created an increasingly tense relationship with their Catholic neighbours. This polarisation was to be a feature of life for the Irish in the communities of northern England, with both communities demarcating their territory by means of symbol and brute force.

The social background of Irish immigrants arriving in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century is central to any understanding of their experience in the new communities. Their deep sense of history and particularly their shared grievances meant that they arrived with pre-conceived ideas regarding members of the host community. The fact that the formative experiences of many of these individuals were registered in an increasingly hostile sectarian environment had an important influence on immigrant attitudes. The jaundiced English opinion of the Irish has generally been considered in isolation. Irish doubts and misgivings regarding their neighbours have received scant attention. The fact that not alone did the Irish experience prejudice in Britain but also harboured their own negative feelings regarding the English had obvious implications for relations between the immigrant and the native communities. The denial of Irish opinion is a reflection of the strength of the anti-Irish stereotype and of colonial arrogance in assuming that the Irish/colonised were insufficiently sophisticated to form opinions of their own. This Chapter has indicated the inaccuracy of this assumption and the remainder of this study will demonstrate the practical ways in which Irish immigrants celebrated and asserted their self-awareness.

Section Three

Identity in Practice

## Chapter Four

### The Political World of Irish Migrants

Thus far, the Irish communities in Yorkshire and Lancashire have been discussed in terms of numbers and statistics. The development of a distinctive Irish identity has been addressed, as has the growth of English self-opinion and the relationship between the two. It has been shown that towards the second half of the eighteenth century, the Irish were becoming ever more polarised along religious lines and religious denomination was increasingly their defining identity. In this chapter, a particular aspect of the lives of Irish immigrants, namely politics, will be examined, in order to determine the effects of identity on their attitudes and behaviour. It will be seen that far from being a *tabula rasa*, Irish immigrants, particularly in the larger communities of the northern towns, could be described as a pressure group. Those immigrants who had come to Britain from the mid-1820s, had witnessed the political transformation of their native communities under the guidance of O'Connell and the Catholic Association, with the assistance of the priesthood. The Irish Catholic community transplanted, remained very much under the control of their 'uncrowned king', Daniel O'Connell; they saw their interests as synonymous with those of their fellow countrymen in Ireland, rather than with the working classes of Britain, which is understandable if their rhetoric about returning home was to be believed. It will be seen that they were easily mobilised when questions relating to their native land were at issue.

The strong correlation between religious and political belief was a feature of life on both sides of the Irish sea, particularly in this period. The formation of the Orange Order in Britain, for example, must be set against the growing sense of crisis which pervaded the Establishment at this time. Political insecurity abroad was coupled with domestic challenges such as the reform movement, the growth of trade unions, the Catholic question and attacks on the position of the Church of England. The need to defend Church and Constitution became paramount among the Tory-Anglican faction and the Orange Order provided an outlet for their frustrations. Orangeism might have remained in obscurity without the emancipation crisis, but from 1821-1835 it was taken over by a group of aristocratic, extreme Protestants including the Dukes of York and Cumberland. The total membership of the Orange Order in 1830 has been estimated at 7800 and lodges were highly concentrated in the textile towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire.<sup>143</sup> The annual Orange procession and St Patrick's Day parade became flashpoints of confrontation between the two communities in these areas, as has been noted previously.

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<sup>143</sup> F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819-1914*, 1988, p. 27.



Irish Protestants were concerned with the defence of Church and State, which meant their political outlook was generally ultra-Tory. Irish Catholics, in contrast, were committed to the protection of Ireland's best interests, which made them natural reformer/radicals in British political terms. The Tories had been in power continually for thirty years and, therefore, in Irish Catholic eyes, the responsibility for all Ireland's ills could be placed firmly at their door. Furthermore the links between the Tory and the Orange faction pushed Irish Catholics into the opposing camp. According to Samuel Bamford, the Irish took warmly to processions of radicals passing through their midst.<sup>144</sup> The campaign for Catholic emancipation further cemented the Whig/Irish relationship, since the Whigs were pro-emancipation from an early date. Although the Tories finally granted emancipation, it was done with such reluctance that they were unable to capitalise on the measure. They remained the enemy in Catholic perception as can be seen by a letter in the Liverpool Mercury asking Catholics to vote for a Liberal candidate in the 1837 election:

'The Tories as a body always have been and continue to be our bitter oppressors. To the very last moment they unjustly withheld our civil rights and although we have not been so much restrained in the exercise of our religion as our ancestors were, we have nevertheless suffered and still suffer many pains and penalties.'<sup>145</sup>

The campaign for Catholic emancipation in England was organised differently to that in Ireland. English Catholics were at pains to prove their loyalty and similarity to other English citizens, and this meant disassociating themselves from their Irish co-religionists. English Catholicism represented itself as tolerant, aristocratic and loyal - an image which the Irish could easily damage. These differences made it difficult for the Irish to see English Catholics as Catholics first and English second and conflict between the two traditions was the order of the day. As Lord Stourton, one of the leaders of English Catholicism at a national level, is reported to have said:

What have we to do with the Irish? We have nothing to do with them but to pray for them.'<sup>146</sup>

These conflicts would probably have had the effect of keeping Irish immigrants out of the campaign of the British Catholic Association, although there are isolated examples of

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<sup>144</sup> G. P. Connolly, *'Catholicism in Manchester and Salford 1770-1850: the Search for 'le chretien Quelconque''*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Manchester, 1980, p.384.

<sup>145</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 21st July 1837.

<sup>146</sup> G. Connolly, *op. cit.*, p. 61

involvement. At the first annual meeting of the Liverpool Catholic Association in October 1825, for example, a resolution was passed that the Society of St Patrick should be enrolled as members.<sup>147</sup>

The alliance formed between reformers and the Irish was solidified in the early 1830s by Daniel O'Connell. Earl Grey's cabinet had accepted the liberalisation of the Irish Coercion Act in 1833. Russell's remarks on lay appropriation, and the resignation of Stanley in 1834, led O'Connell to believe that the Whigs intended to rethink the position of the Church of Ireland in the near future. The setback of the Tories' return to power in 1834 pushed O'Connell into a formal alliance with the Whigs (the Lichfield House Compact) to overthrow Peel's government. When the Whigs gained victory in 1835, O'Connell decided to entrust the future of Ireland to them. During the under-secretaryship of Thomas Drummond, the alliance achieved some success - the Orange monopoly on public appointments was broken; jury packing became less marked and tithe commutation went some way towards allaying peasant grievances. The Irish in Liverpool played a significant role in the election of the Liberal candidates, Ewart and Brancher, in 1835. In his victory speech Brancher paid tribute to their efforts:

'...He wished to propose three cheers for their Irish brethren (loud and continued cheers). They had fought gallantly and faithfully by the side of the reformers.'

And at the election dinner that evening :

'Liverpool is so closely connected with the sister country that it may almost be said to be as much in Ireland as in England. I therefore give the next toast with peculiar pleasure because during the late election our Irish friends fought with us foot to foot and arm to arm and with such spirit that I am persuaded we owe much of our success to them.'<sup>148</sup>

The approval of the Irish immigrant community for the direction of Whig policy in Ireland, particularly the hardline taken against the Orange Order, is demonstrated by the appeal of 'an Irishman' to his countrymen not to hold the customary St Patrick's Day parade in 1836:

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<sup>147</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 4th November 1825. The Society of St Patrick was formed in 1807 to promote education among the children of the Irish poor. More research is required on the involvement of Irish immigrants in the British campaign for Catholic emancipation.

<sup>148</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 9th January 1835.

'The time has arrived and I am extremely proud of it when the general government of the kingdom and the authorities in all our large towns are sincerely and seriously engaged in devising the best plans for Ireland's regeneration'<sup>149</sup>

The Benevolent Society of St Patrick came to the resolution not to hold a public dinner, or to process, 'in order to show their respect for the late decision of the government and their desire to put down everything in the shape of party feeling.' The parade did go ahead since preparations by this time were well advanced, otherwise the advice to stop 'in the spirit of the late parliamentary proceeding and the admonition of His Majesty would not have been disregarded.'<sup>150</sup> Such action is of great interest since it implies that the St Patrick's Day parade, rather than being simply an excuse for merrymaking, was seen by participants as an act of defiance.

Religion, therefore, can be seen as the determining factor in political identification in towns with a large Irish population. This can be witnessed most clearly in Liverpool. The extent of Irish migration to this traditionally conservative city, combined with the prevalence of casual labour and the absence of the consolidating influence of the factory system created a tense atmosphere. Liverpool was to be dominated throughout the nineteenth century by sectarianism and 'No Popery' politics. In the general election of 1834, the Tories presented themselves as the party of Church and State with the use of placards bearing messages such as the following:

'Huzza for the King, Constitution and  
Church,  
May all plotting contrivers be left in the  
lurch'<sup>151</sup>

Although the Liberals were victorious in 1835, they failed to exploit their victory and their organisational base was allowed to crumble, whilst the Tories were quick to learn from their mistakes. The key to Tory success in Liverpool after 1835 was 'an injection of anti-Catholicism into local politics on a scale unparalleled in England and Wales.'<sup>152</sup> Through organisations such as the Conservative Association (founded 1832), the Protestant Association, the Orange Order, and the Tradesmans' Conservative Association (1836), the

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<sup>149</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 11th March 1836.

<sup>150</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 8th April 1836, Refers to the Select Committee investigation of the Orange Institution

<sup>151</sup> N. Collins, *Politics and Elections in Nineteenth Century Liverpool*, (Scholar Press, Aldershot, 1994), p.11.

<sup>152</sup> F. Neal, *op. cit.* p. 42.

Tories were able to unite their support at all levels. Their opportunity to attack the Liberals came with educational reform.

The Liberals intended to ensure that education was available for the whole community by making council schools undenominational. Religious instruction was to be based on a selection of scriptures, and students were to be visited by ministers of their own persuasion on a weekly basis. The conflict caused by these reforms would probably have been easily resolved had it not been seized upon by the firebrand M'Neile. M'Neile, who held the living at St Jude's, Liverpool, came from a wealthy Antrim family and was educated at Trinity College Dublin. His political outlook was based on two principles: that the Catholic Church was the enemy of Christianity and that its members were engaged in a political conspiracy, and therefore, that it should be resisted at all costs. M'Neile and his likeminded colleagues elsewhere (Stowell in Manchester, Hulton in Bolton), exploited the tense atmosphere to create a militant, almost frenzied form of Protestantism, which delivered important political dividends for the Tories. The general election of 1837 indicated exactly where the Irish/Orange parties believed their interests lay. The Liverpool Mercury declared that 'this election witnessed disturbances more violent and more disgraceful than ever occurred at any previous election within our memory.' Both parties were involved in the rioting, but the Liberal candidates had to admit that their supporters were the original aggressors. In Greenland Street at the south end of the city an old Irish Protestant woman was attacked by a mob who allegedly yelled 'Murder the Bloody Protestant'. The wrath of the Irish was perhaps aroused by election placards which were posted around the city carrying messages such as the following:

'Irishmen! Do not forget your thousand wrongs; your green fields steeped by the Orange faction in the blood of your countrymen. Leinster, Munster, Connaught, Ulster to your posts! 'Alien Irishmen' Call your meetings instantly! Organise your bodies! Remember Red Rathcormack. Let no traitor to Liberty and Ireland be amongst you. He who is not with us is against us. To Your tents O Israel!'<sup>153</sup>

Ewart and Elphinstone, the Liberal candidates, whose names appeared at the foot of this notice, denied all knowledge of it and the Mercury attempted to play down its significance by arguing that the majority of the Irish in Liverpool were illiterate:

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<sup>153</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 28th July 1837.

'Although the majority of them can neither read nor write they can feel an insult very acutely and they know it has for some time past been the practice of certain ministers of the gospel spouters at public meetings and unprincipled hacks of the Orange press to revile and misrepresent their body and ridicule the faith of their ancestors to which they are sincerely devoted. They know also that some of the Protestant clergy of Liverpool have got up petitions for repealing the Catholic emancipation bill - that they have from the pulpit branded Catholics en masse as men not to be trusted on their oaths. Under these circumstances are we to be surprised that in a town where nearly one third of the population is Catholic, banners inscribed 'No Popery' paraded insultingly through the town should have led to tumult and outrage.'<sup>154</sup>

Thus it may be said that Irish Protestants generally saw their interests as similar to those of the Tory faction, while Irish Catholics lent their support to the Liberal/reform body - although this was less through a conviction of the universal benefits of reform than a belief that Ireland's interests could best be protected through an alliance with them. As Connolly has stated:

'The great public demonstrations that brought out the Irish... in huge numbers, were inevitably those which focused attention upon the especial problems of Ireland. Radicals may have been the organisers of some of these meetings but Ireland was the attraction.'<sup>155</sup>

The 20, 000 people who came to hear Shea Lawlor speak, as a representative of the Birmingham Political Union, in Manchester in 1837, came not so much to express their enthusiasm for radicalism as their indignation at the terms of the Irish Disturbances and Suppression Bill.<sup>156</sup> A clearer indication of the first commitment of the Irish to the interests of their homeland can be gauged by the extent of their involvement in the popular movements of the British working classes. Considerable scholarly attention has been

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1837

<sup>155</sup> G. Connolly, *op. cit.* p. 382

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384



focused on the role Irish immigrants in Chartism and Trade Unionism.<sup>157</sup> A large proportion of the Irish population of Britain, being casual labourers, would not have been involved in the trade union movement. Those coming from rural areas of Ireland would have had limited experience of the unionisation of labour. Irish migration was not homogenous, however, and a significant number of Irish immigrants came from urban areas and belonged to organised trades such as weaving and coachmaking. These individuals played an important role in trades disputes in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the 1830s. It is interesting to note, however, that many of these trades were almost the exclusive preserves of the Irish and, therefore, the function of these combinations was often less to unite the interests of the British and Irish working classes, than to promote and protect those of a specifically Irish group. The press, for example, reported meetings of 'the Irish Barnsley weavers' in June 1831, the Irish cloth weavers in August 1832 and the Irish shirting and calico weavers in Manchester in 1830 and 1831.<sup>158</sup> Certainly there were those who were involved in the broader union movement such as John Doherty, the leader of the General Spinners Union or Christopher Doyle of the powerloom weavers, but according to Treble few immigrants were attracted to New Unionism.<sup>159</sup> The opposition of O'Connell, who questioned the legality of the trade unions, and the Catholic Church, who were against any form of society bound by secret oath, drew away much Irish support.

O'Higgins has demonstrated a large Irish presence in the Chartist leadership including such well known names as Feargus O'Connor, Bronterre O'Brien, Deegan of Stalybridge, Doyle and Brophy in Lancaster, Connor and White in Leeds, Hoey in Barnsley, Duffy in Sheffield and West in Hull.<sup>160</sup> Treble, however, has criticised the idea that the numbers of Irish among the leadership should necessarily suggest a large presence among the rank and file. He argues that the leaders of Irish organisations in the 1830s and 1840s were hostile to Chartism and warned their followers away.<sup>161</sup> Thompson has since questioned whether these warnings were in fact heeded by the Irish and presents evidence to the contrary.<sup>162</sup> Part of this evidence is the concern for Ireland and the support for Repeal which were so

<sup>157</sup> For example R. O'Higgins, 'The Irish Influence on the Chartist Movement', *Past & Present*, No. 2, 1961, J. H. Treble, 'O'Connor, O'Connell and the attitudes of Irish Immigrants Towards Chartism in the North of England 1838-1848,' in J. Butt & I.F. Clarke, *The Victorians and Social Protest: A Symposium*, (Newton Abbott, David & Charles, Hamden, Conn. Archon Books, 1973).

<sup>158</sup> See *Leeds Mercury*, 25th June 1831, 4th August 1832, *Manchester Guardian*, 2nd April 1831

<sup>159</sup> J. H. Treble, 'The Attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards Trade Unionism in the North of England 1833-1842', *Northern History*, 5, (1970) p. 98.

<sup>160</sup> R. O'Higgins, 'The Irish Influence on the Chartist Movement', *Past & Present*, No. 2, 1961

<sup>161</sup> J. H. Treble, 'O'Connor, O'Connell and the attitudes of Irish Immigrants Towards Chartism in the North of England 1838-1848,' in J. Butt & I.F. Clarke, *The Victorians and Social Protest: A Symposium*, (Newton Abbott, David & Charles, Hamden, Conn. Archon Books, 1973).

<sup>162</sup> D. Thompson, 'Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism before 1850', in J. Epstein & D. Thompson (eds) *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism & Culture, 1830 - 60*, (London, Macmillan, 1982) pp 120-151.



much a part of the Chartist manifesto. The working population of Britain had an interest in the way Ireland was governed and in the social condition of the Irish. Draconian legislation introduced in Ireland could easily have been extended to the disturbed textile districts, and poor living conditions prompted the Irish to migrate, increasing competition and, as was believed, driving wages down. Thus the passing of the Coercion Act in Ireland in 1833 aroused an angry response across Britain; radical meetings were held everywhere in opposition. The Irish question was to the forefront of radical agitation among working people and it is therefore unsurprising that the Irish readily joined radical causes. Feargus O'Connor was the son of a leading United Irishman and the Northern Star newspaper which he founded in 1837 took its name from a United Irish journal. The points of the Charter were in keeping with the philosophy of the United Irish movement and therefore many Irish immigrants would have felt a sense of recognition. This was capitalised upon by the direct appeals of the Chartists to the immigrant population. When O'Connell relaunched his campaign for the Repeal of the Union in 1839, the Chartists had to persuade the Irish living among them that Repeal accompanied by the six points would benefit Ireland more than a simple dissolution of the Union:

'Using Irish orators to hold forth on Irish subjects certainly did attract sizeable immigrant audiences to meetings held under the auspices of the Chartist movement.'<sup>163</sup>

O'Connell and O'Connor shared a good deal in their political outlook. O'Connell always emphasised the importance of widening the franchise and this was to be one of the four main points of the Precursor Society founded in 1838. Both men were advocates of the repeal of the Act of Union and worked together in Ireland's interests in the early 1830s. Their opinions began to diverge, however, on the question of the efficacy of the Whig alliance. O'Connell believed that the most likely source of reform for Ireland was the Whig government and therefore, assented to the Lichfield House Compact in 1835. O'Connor and the English Radicals, however, were less satisfied with the Whig record. The 1832 Reform Act was a disappointment and seen as only a beginning of change in contrast to the 'Final Solution' view of the Whigs. The New Poor Law of 1834 was the signal to revolt and O'Connor strongly identified himself with this. O'Connor was devoted to protecting the interests of Ireland, but he saw the way forward in a union between the Irish and English working classes against the middle class. O'Connor's attacks on the Whig government alarmed O'Connell to such an extent that he condemned his association with the English

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<sup>163</sup> J. H. Treble, The Place of the Irish Catholics in the Social Life of the North of England 1829-51, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leeds, 1969, p. 304.

Radicals and suggested he withdraw from Irish politics. Thus the battle lines were drawn over who was fighting for Ireland's true interests.

The outcome of this conflict indicates that Irish immigrants involved in Chartism/Radicalism were there, in the main, to serve Ireland's interests which inevitably they saw lying with O'Connell. Treble argues that 'immigrant support for West Riding Radical associations disappeared almost overnight after the quarrel had occurred'.<sup>164</sup> On these matters even Thompson agrees that the majority of the Irish were with O'Connell.<sup>165</sup> The Irish Radicals of Huddersfield boycotted a dinner held in O'Connor's honour in Halifax because of his attack on O'Connell. It is also significant that following the split, O'Connor was attacked as a traitor to his Irish background. He was commonly referred to as a 'renegade Irishman' or an 'ex-Irishman' and O'Connell derided him in these terms:

'Oh how I blush for the big O before  
that name! The first newspaper that I see  
it in I shall wet my thumb and rub it  
out!'<sup>166</sup>

James Byrne, the secretary of the Precursor Society on the Chester-Birkenhead railway, summed up the feeling in these words:

'Who is he that's hated most in Ireland  
and over the world? The renegade that  
exchanges the shamrock for the rose and  
panders to the vices of the Tory radicals  
for a petty pittance.'<sup>167</sup>

The two men were further divided on their attitude to physical force. O'Connell had always taken a hard line against violence, believing that peaceful constitutional agitation was the only way forward and, therefore, viewed O'Connor's overtures towards physical force with horror. The Newport Rising of 1839 confirmed O'Connell in his hostility towards the Chartists. It was necessary for the leaders of the Irish in Britain to disassociate themselves from Chartism, both to satisfy O'Connell and to avoid falling foul of the Law:

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<sup>164</sup> *ibid.* p. 280.

<sup>165</sup> D. Thompson, 'Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism before 1850', in J. Epstein & D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism and Culture* (MacMillan, London, 1982), p. 135.

<sup>166</sup> D. Hickey, *Urban Catholics in England & Wales from 1829 to the Present Day*, (G. Chapman, London, Dublin, 1967), p. 140. A popular rhyme at the time went:  
'By Mac or O, you'll always know true Irishmen they say,  
For if they lack both O and Mac, no Irishmen are they.'

<sup>167</sup> J. H. Treble, *Irish Attitudes to Chartism*, p. 42-3

'...the Precursors dread a retrograde movement in Ireland, they dread the revival of Orangeism and religious intolerance from which the Chartists have nothing to fear and therefore the Precursors and the Irish people with O'Connell at their head will fight only for Victoria, their Queen and friend.'<sup>168</sup>

The violent tendencies of the Chartists together with their anti-clerical and anti-religious reputation prejudiced the clergy and in turn many of the Irish Catholic laity against them:

'The Chartists are very violent and some of their leaders are ignorant revolutionists. I was therefore much pleased to hear that the Rev Gibson of St Patrick's denounced their violent proceedings on Sunday last and cautioned his congregation against the error of attending meetings even from a motive of curiosity.'<sup>169</sup>

By 1842, antagonism between English Chartists and Irish Catholics had reached violent proportions. O'Connell was invited to attend a reform festival in Leeds in January 1841 and the Northern Star demanded that its supporters should attend to demonstrate their hatred of O'Connell. Chartists arrived from far and wide, but were ultimately disappointed as O'Connell failed to attend through fear for his personal safety. This began a period of aggression which was fought out on the platform of the Anti-Corn Law League. O'Connell was highly in favour of a repeal of the Corn Laws which he believed could only benefit Ireland. Speaking at a meeting in Manchester in 1840 he said:

'In Ireland especially what do we find? Not only are her provisions exported but her population also. Are there not sixty or seventy thousand Irish in Manchester? And if the Corn Laws afford high wages why have they not done it for those now in Ireland? Will

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<sup>168</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 31st May 1839. Letter from George Smyth.

<sup>169</sup> Liverpool Mercury 31<sup>st</sup> May 1839 Charles Dangan, a Repealer living in Stockport, considered the suggestion that he was a Chartist as 'highly injurious to his character as an Irishman..he would never join those who were in the constant habit of villifying the venerated priesthood and the mighty leader of the Irish people.' Freeman's Journal, 12th March 1842.

there not be additional advantages conferred upon England if the Irish labourer could obtain higher wages ? And is it not manifest that both England and Ireland are suffering under the influence of those Corn Laws?'<sup>170</sup>

Many of the Irish clergy supported the League, including the Rev Kaye in Bradford and most notably Daniel Hearne, the parish priest of St Patrick's in Manchester. The Chartists, however, believed that the League was a self-interested tactic of the middle classes to distract the working man from agitation for genuine social reform. They therefore determined to disrupt the League's meetings which encouraged the League to establish its own working class support by forming the Operative Anti-Corn Law Associations in Lancashire and by approaching Irish immigrant leaders in Manchester for support. O'Connell had expressed his support for the League and an agreement was reached with his approval between Watkin, an important figure in the League, and Duggan, the head of the Manchester Repealers, 'to break the Chartist control of public meetings.'<sup>171</sup> The Manchester Irish were further drawn into an alliance with the League by the appointment of an Irish Catholic named Finnegan as a League lecturer. The Irish brought muscle into the alliance and according to McCord there is evidence of payment for these physical services which were put to use at a Chartist meeting in May 1841:

'...our associates and the Irish and the other Repealers of the union and the Corn Laws mustered in full strength and we had as pretty a row as I have ever witnessed.'<sup>172</sup>

This violence was to become a pattern for meetings of both parties throughout the year. In October, for example, a Chartist attempted to interfere with a free trade meeting:

'One speech in support of it was listened to, the second speaker was refused a hearing. Mr Ackland then spoke in favour of the original motion but was interrupted by a Chartist in the centre of the room. Upon this a body of Irish (Corn Law repealers) rose. A cry of

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<sup>170</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 17th January 1840.

<sup>171</sup> N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1958), p.99.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

'Put him out' was raised and presently a forest of shillelaghs was seen flourishing in the air. The forms were upset and the sides of several of them torn off and converted into staves. In attempting to gain the door several parties were overturned and lay struggling in heaps upon the floor in different parts of the room but notwithstanding the 'dreadful note of preparation' for the melee no person as far as we could learn received any serious damage. In short the Irish became almost the exclusive possessors of the room and gave an expression to their triumphs in a way peculiar to themselves.<sup>173</sup>

The clearest example of the importance of identity to immigrant politics can be seen in the Repeal movement, which was active in the 1830s and early 1840s. O'Connell had been opposed to the Union at the time of its enactment and, once emancipation had been won, he turned his attention to the repeal of the legislation. The hope engendered by the Whig alliance, however, meant Repeal was relegated to the back burner until 1838 when the failure of government to deal with municipal reform and to settle the tithe question led O'Connell to form the Precursor Society. This body was committed to household suffrage, increased parliamentary representation, the reform of Ireland's municipal corporations and the abolition of tithes. Unless these concessions were granted within twelve months O'Connell promised to devote himself to Repeal. In 1840 he formed the National Association for Full and Prompt Justice or Repeal which shortly afterwards became the Loyal National Repeal Association. Using similar tactics to those employed in the emancipation campaign, the movement reached its zenith in 1843. By 1845, however, the government had suppressed the monster meetings and arrested O'Connell, striking a blow from which the movement would never recover.

Nowlan has placed Repeal firmly in the context of eighteenth century constitutional nationalism which regarded Ireland not as a conquered nation but a country of freemen ruled by the king under their own independent institutions.<sup>174</sup> This gave substance to the eighteenth century claim to a separate Irish nation and an individual Irish consciousness. O'Connell drew on this thinking, although he never clarified his vision of the relationship between England and Ireland. His was essentially a pragmatic policy of pursuing reform

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

<sup>174</sup> K. Nowlan, 'The Meaning of Repeal in Irish History,' *Historical Studies*, IV, 1963.

from the most likely source, but once the Repeal campaign was underway, the promotion of a distinct sense of Irish identity was deemed politic. Edward Hayes, a Leeds Repealer, suggested that Ireland could only be properly governed by her own representatives whose intimate knowledge and experience would guarantee the protection of her interests:

'The object which we seek to obtain and for which we have called together is plain and simple - namely for Ireland to be governed by laws made by the representatives of our own people - by men who understand our wants, who anticipate our wishes and over whom we can exert a just and legitimate control. It is our inalienable right to be governed by that form of government too which would afford the best security for the enjoyment of our liberties..the great owners of the soil are to all intents and purposes foreigners, who feel no interest in that soil but for its produce, who have no local attachments and reciprocate no local benefits and expend none of that produce on the devoted people by whom it has been raised.'<sup>175</sup>

In demanding a separate legislature Doheny emphasised the powerful sense of a separate identity among the Irish:

'We are here to assert a separate identity, to claim separate laws, separate institutions and a separate legislature - (cheers) Our claims are based upon the great truths which our history collects, that there is inherent in the tendencies, in the feelings in the passions and the genius of both countries, some elements repulsive of each other which through good and evil refuse to coalesce. The simplest incidents common in everyday life are often more unerring evidences of the organisation of national character than the most enduring monuments of science, philosophy or legislation. Through our music, our ballads, our passions, the course of our sorrows and our joys are, I will not say so different

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<sup>175</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 31st January 1842.



from, but so opposed to those of England, that it is impossible not to see the hearts of both countries, of which these things whether feelings, actions or emotions are the most significant signs, can never be absorbed in a common identity (loud cheers) We differ from the people of England almost in everything. Our ideas of honour, of disgrace, of virtue, or of vice are not the same.<sup>176</sup>

The repeal of the Act of Union by this argument was equivalent to a divorce on the grounds of irreconcilable differences. The importance of a sense of identity to the Repeal movement can be seen clearly in a common justification put forward for the measure, on this occasion by Patrick Curran on behalf of forty five Manchester Repealers:

'Many will no doubt ask are we justified in seeking for Repeal. To the men of England I would reply 'Only make the case your own, let the British parliament be transferred to France or even to Ireland and the power and prosperity of England would rapidly decline. London would soon be like Dublin, depopulated, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham (which at present employ so many thousands in their various branches of manufacture) would soon wear a similar aspect.'<sup>177</sup>

The English aversion to the French was often exploited in this way by Repealers in an attempt to justify their position. This is significant, as Colley's thesis suggests that English national identity was based on Protestantism and opposition to the French and it is, therefore, no accident that the French were used to explain the sense of outrage felt by the Irish.<sup>178</sup> Domination by any foreign power would have been unthinkable for the English, but only the French could be seen as comparably offensive to English opinion as the latter were to the Irish.

Repeal had a particular meaning for those Irish immigrants who became involved with the Association. Many of Ireland's miseries were traced to the Act of Union. Dublin lost its status as a capital and thus lost much of its appeal as a social centre, which contributed to

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<sup>176</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 24th May 1845.

<sup>177</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22nd August 1840.

<sup>178</sup> L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (London, 1992).

increased absenteeism. The Union was believed to have encouraged the increasing disparity in the wealth of the two countries - Ireland had become further impoverished since the Union and the Government had done little to alleviate the situation. The pre-Union period was remembered as a Golden Age. It was true that trade in textiles and agriculture entered a quarter century boom from the mid 1740s, boosted by years of continual war. In reality, however, problems had set in during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Structural weaknesses were beginning to show, such as the rapidly growing population, increased landlessness, and the insecurity of the textiles industry. The timing of these changes, however, led to their association with the Act of Union and many immigrants explained the circumstances which caused them to migrate by reference to the Union. If the Union were repealed and the other reforms which the movement demanded were introduced, Ireland would be revived and the 'exiles' could return home:

' We are sojourners in this land, compelled by the loss of our native parliament, to seek the refuge of labour amongst strangers..We wish not for a separation of nations as our enemies and some hypocritical reformers falsely assert. But we wish to see ourselves at home under the fatherly care of our paternal parliament.'<sup>179</sup>

A letter containing Repeal Association remittances from Bradford in November 1840, declares that:

'..the great majority of the persons composing the present list, though resident in England, cherish the hope that they are only temporary sojourners in another land. Their connection with Ireland may be severed for the present but it does not destroy that hereditary devotion to their country which follows an Irishman like his shadow into the most distant regions of the earth. In prospect at least they anticipate the pleasure of once again receiving in the country of their births and under the promising auspices of national independence, the remuneration of their

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<sup>179</sup> Freeman's Journal, 15th September 1840, Letter from Ashton-Under-Lyme

skill and toil, which they are now unwillingly compelled to seek in the extensive labour market of manufacturing Britain.'<sup>180</sup>

Again in March 1841, Mr. Duffy speaking at the weekly meeting of the Loyal National Repeal Association at the Corn Exchange in Dublin stated:

'He could....say this much for himself, that though absent for a long period he had never forgotten her interests and that his heart still beat warm for his native land (loud cheers). There were thousands of Irishmen in England who felt as he did - men who were obliged to expatriate themselves from their native land by the tyranny and misgovernment of that country.... Let the Government give Ireland fair play - let her receive the superior protection of her native legislature - and means will be found for the employment of the millions at home who unfortunately were then obliged to go to Britain.'<sup>181</sup>

These extracts clearly support the idea that many Irish immigrants did not see themselves as migrants in any permanent sense and if similar employment opportunities had existed in Ireland, they would have eagerly returned home. This explains the interest of Irish immigrants in promoting remedial measures for their native land, such as those championed by the Repeal movement. This would suggest that these immigrants had a limited vision of a common destiny with their English neighbours.

The popularity of the Repeal movement also had much to do with the sense of pride engendered by the cause. Many of the letters from Britain to the central council of the movement, emphasise the prejudice and abuse which the Irish met with in their new homes on a daily basis. The inferior and subservient position of Ireland in relation to Britain was seen to be reflected in the way in which the Irish were looked down upon by the English. Thus the successes of Daniel O'Connell and the achievement of a domestic legislature became a matter of pride. With a native parliament, Ireland would take her place among the nations and would be accorded due respect, which in turn would be transmitted to the Irish people. Michael McGuinness wrote from the Hartlepool and Greatham railway works

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<sup>180</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 26th November 1840.

<sup>181</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16th March 1841

with details of the insults and outrages inflicted by the lower orders of Englishmen upon Irish workers and claimed 'if we had our native parliament we would not be suffering these outrages'<sup>182</sup> The following letter from Bradford in 1843, clearly sums up the feeling:

'The sneer of prejudice - national in the feeling but often personal in the application - which is daily encountered by an Irishman in this country produces one beneficial result and one only - that is a desire to use every energy to erase that blot of national dependence which exposes him to such gratuitous contempt. One wrong felt stimulates more than a thousand described. Most Irishmen resident in England might add their testimony to mine on this point.'<sup>183</sup>

Timothy Duggan, the leader of the movement in the Manchester area, testified to an equally uncomfortable atmosphere there:

'The cruel and unChristian manner in which the poor Irish, who have wasted their physical energies in aggrandising England, are treated in London and other places, is confirmation of the already frequently demonstrated fact that there exists a complete indifference to the interests of Irishmen and a total absence of sympathy for their sufferings in this country. We fain cherish the hope that the time is not far distant when the restoration of her parliament will be followed by the establishment of manufactures in Ireland, her natural resources developed and her sons put on perfect equality with Englishmen.'<sup>184</sup>

George Smyth, writing from Liverpool in 1843, offered the same solution to the low morale of his fellow Irish immigrants:

'Is he deserving of the name of Irishman, who would not feel proud at seeing in the pages of this country a full report of the speeches delivered in the Irish 'parliament', that the Irish metropolis was

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<sup>182</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1st December 1840

<sup>183</sup> 1843 Bradford,

<sup>184</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 20th January 1842.

crowded with distinguished visitors from England and various parts of Europe - that the city was rapidly increasing in population and prosperity and that several deputations from the provinces had interviews with ministers relative to questions of commerce and local improvements? Depend upon it Sir, self respect is associated with national respect by every intelligent Irishman.'<sup>185</sup>

One reason for such pride and strength of commitment to the cause, was the emphasis on the morality of the struggle. O'Connell resurrected the image used by the poets, of the Saxon barbarian versus the noble Irish peasant. Great emphasis was placed on Ireland as a Christian country, a holy nation whose people spread the word wherever they travelled. As the underdog - the David to England's Goliath - Ireland gained a moral strength from a physical weakness. O'Connell demanded the justice which his persecuted countrymen had every right to expect:

'In no country in the world have the people been more ready to obey the moral influence of opinion. They did so when Christianity first spread throughout the land and the coming of St Patrick afforded the great religious spectacle of the horrors of paganism yielding without a struggle before the truth of Christianity. They did so when the electric spirit of the time actuated the forty-shilling freeholders in 1825 and they are doing so in the majestic movement of Temperance, which is so extending throughout the land. Shall the people of Ireland then endure the degrading treatment to which they have been subjected? It is impossible it can continue. They are too great - they have swollen in their moral state so largely and majestically that their chains must break and leave them free and disenthralled in spite of their enemies.'<sup>186</sup>

The rationale was that if the cause was just it could only succeed and this belief was confirmed by the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829. This concept of a

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<sup>185</sup> Freeman's Journal, 9th April 1842.

<sup>186</sup> Freeman's Journal, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1840.

superior morality became an essential part of Irish Catholic identity, as has been noted previously.

The sense of pride engendered by the Repeal movement was given a greater significance by contemporary observers, who noted an improvement in the 'moral, social and intellectual condition of the Irish population.'

'They are becoming a reading, thoughtful and intelligent community...The best proof of this is another gratifying fact that every Saturday evening or Sunday morning, upwards of 3000 newspapers advocating Repeal or justice to Ireland, if that be anything different, exclusive of local newspapers are purchased by the Irish patriots in Liverpool... I believe that we have by our local agitation, without giving offence to anyone, done more to promote the social welfare and education of the Irish in Liverpool than our municipal government and its clerical supporters.'<sup>187</sup>

The Repeal movement provided Irish immigrants, living with daily humiliation and rejection in the new communities, with a new found dignity and pride built on a foundation of hope. By the demonstration of their commitment to the interests of Ireland, they defied their detractors and refused to make themselves invisible. The immigrant community, however, was not content with displaying its growing self-respect to the host population. In reading the correspondence of the Repeal movement, it becomes clear that one of the most important motivating factors for immigrants joining the cause in Britain, was a desire to prove their loyalty to those they had left behind. This correspondence is peppered with demands for recognition and rebukes when contributions have been overlooked. Timothy Duggan wrote from Manchester in 1840:

'You will I trust have the names published in the weekly papers. As lovers of old Ireland they feel a pride in having their names read out in the presence of their friends.'<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 6th August 1844

<sup>188</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 4th September 1840.



And again later in the year:

I send you by Mr. S. Healy...the subscriptions of 124 Repealers whose names we would wish to see in the Freeman or Registry, as our subscribers are impatient to testify publicly their enrolment in the cause of old Ireland.<sup>189</sup>

The Repealers of Liverpool, in their anxiety to outdo their colleagues in the area, were outraged when their contributions went unreported:

'On the 24th ult there was a remittance of 6/ 5s 3d to your association and on 4th inst. another of 8/ 8s 4d, neither of which has been recognised by the Repeal press. That circumstance however much we may regret it from a spirit of honest rivalry in a patriotic cause has in no way abated the zeal and activity of the Liverpool Repealers.'<sup>190</sup>

The fact that the good opinion of those friends and family remaining at home was so earnestly courted, suggests that many Irish migrants still regarded themselves as members of these communities.

Ironically, in their eagerness to prove the benefits of Repeal to the British, the Irish succeeded in feeding the prejudice which they were already experiencing. A native parliament, the Repealers argued, would ensure that Ireland's interests were given priority, the economy would develop and there would no longer be a need for Irish migrants to come to Britain to compete for jobs and depress wages. The Repealers of Leeds wrote to the central committee in 1843, to say that they had succeeded in persuading the working people of that town:

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<sup>189</sup> Freeman's Journal, 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1840.

<sup>190</sup> The Nation, 18th February, 1843. '...I believe that the Repealers of Liverpool will be satisfied with the public acknowledgement of the amount of their weekly remittance although if they desired anything more their motive for doing so would be that they have not, as is the case in most parts of Ireland, a local press to record their labours or offer them a word of hope or encouragement in their patriotic career - that they were constant and faithful to the cause when it was not so popular or hopeful as it is at present and finally that there is not in Ireland a parish or town of any sort that could not find a native representative in Liverpool. An audience of Liverpool Repealers is an audience composed of individuals from every county and town in Ireland.'

'...that it is in their interests as well as ours that we should devote our talent and ingenuity to the development of the fruitful resources of Ireland, for every man of us who comes here and procures employment in any capacity, takes the place of an Englishman and as the depressed and impoverished state of our own country has habituated us to live upon the lowest complement of food capable of sustaining life, we have through necessity been often glad to sell our labour at a much more reduced rate than the Englishman, who has been accustomed to the best of fare.'<sup>191</sup>

In the first phase of Repeal activity from 1830-35, there is little evidence of any great enthusiasm for the cause. A Repeal rally held in Manchester in 1831, attracted 1200 people, but failed to inspire any long lasting results.<sup>192</sup> The first local Repeal Association was established in Oldham in February 1834, but again interest was limited.<sup>193</sup> This is hardly surprising when it is remembered that O'Connell himself was very hesitant on the issue and at this stage had established nothing comparable to the organisation of the 1840s. Treble, in addition, attributes the apathetic reaction to the absence of clerical support for the movement in the early stages, since there were very few Irish priests in the north of England at this time.<sup>194</sup> This situation had changed, however, by 1840, and it was then that Repeal became a realistic goal for the Irish community in Britain. The cause of Repeal in Britain was advanced through weekly lectures and open meetings which discussed the campaign and transmitted O'Connell's speeches and the proceedings at the Corn Exchange. Reading rooms were established wherein members could read the Repeal newspapers the Freeman's Journal and The Nation. A Repeal Rent was collected along the same lines as the Catholic Rent with members paying an annual subscription of one pound and associates contributing one shilling per year.<sup>195</sup> Towns were divided into wards with an elected president, secretary and treasurer; the ward was managed by the Repeal warden and the ward committee. The Repeal warden was responsible for appointing the collectors of the rent, for transmitting funds and membership lists to Dublin, for circulating newspapers and for disciplining his ward.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Freeman's Journal, 2nd September, 1843.

<sup>192</sup> Manchester Guardian, 29th January, 1831.

<sup>193</sup> Connolly, thesis, p. 385.

<sup>194</sup> Treble, thesis, p. 322.

<sup>195</sup> O'Connell papers, National Library of Ireland, MS3191- Rules of the National Association of Ireland.

<sup>196</sup> The Nation, 1st July, 1843.

Liverpool, unsurprisingly, was one of the first towns to take up the challenge of Repeal. It had been the only northern town to set up a local branch of the Precursor Society which boasted 3000 members by April 1839.<sup>197</sup> A meeting with Daniel O'Connell in August 1840, provided the stimulus for a local Repeal organisation, despite their leader's initial lack of enthusiasm. A group of local notables, including the Catholic priest, waited upon O'Connell, to consult with him about the expediency of agitating the Repeal question in Liverpool. He suggested that this would be impolitic, no doubt because of the tense, sectarian atmosphere in the city and the urgency of securing an election victory over the Tory/Orange faction which, he believed, could best be achieved if the Irish community were to rally round the Liberal candidates.<sup>198</sup> The Irish in Liverpool, despite their attachment to O'Connell, were undeterred and began to organise themselves. They took commodious apartments in Preston Street, Whitechapel, 'to hold meetings, enrol members and transact other business.'<sup>199</sup> Repealers collected signatures outside the church on a Sunday after Mass, much to the outrage of the parish priest, an Englishman. His lack of enthusiasm led to his being abused 'in language of a most disrespectful nature - language which every Christian must condemn'. Those responsible were irritated by the complaints of the priest since the chapel 'had been built principally by the poorer classes of Irishmen in Liverpool and called St Patrick's chapel.'<sup>200</sup> Despite these difficulties and the opposition they received in the Liverpool press, Mr. Duffy, when addressing the L.N.R.A meeting in Dublin, was able to confirm that they were 'going on triumphantly':

'Since the Repeal agitation commenced the Irish people in Liverpool deemed themselves capable of managing their own affairs and had consequently formed themselves into a society capable of embodying the public sentiment.'<sup>201</sup>

Liverpool was divided into forty districts, with two collectors appointed to each district. The warm manner in which the collectors were received at an early stage led Duffy to be optimistic about the future and the possibility of extending the organisation into the outlying districts. In the summer of 1842, thirty four Liverpool Repealers went to Birkenhead to inspire their fellow countrymen resident in that town, and in 1843, they were approached for help by the Irish in Ormskirk and other small towns in the region.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Treble, thesis, p.319.

<sup>198</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 15th February 1841.

<sup>199</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11th September 1840

<sup>200</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16th March 1841.

<sup>201</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16th March 1841.

<sup>202</sup> *The Nation*, 29th October 1842, 25th March 1843.

Manchester and the surrounding area, under the guidance of Irish manufacturer Timothy Duggan, sent large remittances to the central council from early in 1840. By 1842, there were a number of Repeal centres: Kennedy's Temperance Rooms, Cable Street; Swan Steet and Redfern Street as well as Great Ancoats Street, Mason Street, Charles Street, The Derby Arms, George Street, Hulme, Little Ireland and Hardman Street, Salford.<sup>203</sup> By this date Manchester boasted eight reading rooms, all subscribing to The Freeman's Journal, The Nation and The True Tablet. The town was divided into wards, which corresponded with parishes or took the patronage of a saint: St Patrick's, St Wilfred's, St Joseph's, St Augustine's, St Margaret's, St Chad's, St Bridget's, and O'Connell ward. Duggan and his colleagues spread the message and monitored the progress of Repeal in neighbouring areas such as Ashton, Hyde, Rochdale, Oldham, Bolton, and Leeds. A remittance from Stalybridge of 1/ 17s, the subscription of thirty seven Repealers, was accompanied by a message which told of the gains made on behalf of their country by these 'public spirited and patriotic' Irish individuals in the short space of eight days:

'We have divided the town into six wards and two zealous and industrious wardens have been appointed to supervise each ward. Although one eighth of the Irish in this town have not been canvassed, two hundred people have given in their names and will be waited upon weekly until the amount necessary to make them registered Repealers is subscribed. The other portion of Irish inhabitants will be waited upon without delay and I feel assured that in a few weeks almost every Irishman, aye, and Irishwoman too will have themselves enrolled among the saviours of their country.'<sup>204</sup>

The above extract gives an idea of the way in which the Repeal movement in Britain operated but it also demonstrates how the spread of the movement throughout the country facilitated the growth of national feeling among Irish immigrants. There was a highly mobile community and, therefore, strong contacts between the Irish in the north of England would have existed to transmit information about housing and employment opportunities. The cause of Repeal opened further channels of communication and, as has been

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<sup>203</sup> Connolly, thesis, p. 391.

<sup>204</sup> Freeman's Journal, 23rd March 1842.

demonstrated, even encouraged friendly rivalry between towns, thus enabling the Irish to see themselves as a national community within Britain.

In September 1840, Duggan wrote to promise the parent organisation that 'the Irishmen of Leeds will to a man be Repealers' but mobilisation in this area was a little more sluggish than he predicted.<sup>205</sup> Looking back in 1843, Henry Molloy, Senior Repeal Warden of the town, recalled an apathetic response to the first calls for Repeal. Undaunted, however, Molloy traveled round the town, calling on as many as he thought likely to help him and the result of this was a meeting in the large room of the commercial buildings. This meeting was 'filled to suffocation' and through continued perseverance, the Repealers of Leeds held weekly meetings on Sunday evenings in Walker's Temperance Hall, Duncan Street. The committee was made up of individuals as active and patriotic 'as ever left the green shores of Erin'. Collectors such as Mr. John Kelly traveled up to eight miles on a Sunday to gather the subscriptions from the townships in which the Irish were located.<sup>206</sup> In Bradford weekly meetings were held in the White House Tavern, Broadstone and a meeting of Repealers in this town in January 1843 reported the addition of 150 names to the Repeal register.<sup>207</sup> In Sheffield, meetings were held on Sunday evenings in the Fig Tree Inn.<sup>208</sup>

As for the numerical strength of the movement, in June 1842, membership in Liverpool was estimated at 8000 and a figure of 20 000 was confidently predicted to join within the next year.<sup>209</sup> In February 1843, George Smyth, treasurer of the Liverpool society, estimated the number of Repealers at between nine and ten thousand.<sup>210</sup> Four thousand people were said to have attended a meeting in Liverpool in August 1843 with another two thousand being turned away.<sup>211</sup> Reliable figures are hard to come by, but a rough estimate may be made by examining the Repeal Rent returns. In 1843, 'the Repeal year' Liverpool appears to have sent weekly contributions to the association in Dublin. The weekly average for the rent was £14, giving an annual total of £738.<sup>212</sup> The difficulty in interpreting this figure arises from the fact that some individuals would contribute more than the one shilling yearly membership fee. It was stated however that the Repeal Rent of Liverpool was 'generally contributed by weekly subscriptions', that is a farthing a week, a penny a month, a shilling a

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<sup>205</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 15th September 1840

<sup>206</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 21st January 1843

<sup>207</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23rd January 1843

<sup>208</sup> *The Nation*, 10th June 1843.

<sup>209</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 15th June 1842, *The Nation*, 10th June 1843.

<sup>210</sup> *The Nation*, 18th February 1843.

<sup>211</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 26th August 1843

<sup>212</sup> These estimates are taken from the weekly Repeal Rent returns which were printed in the Repeal press.

year.<sup>213</sup> This means that a figure of £738 would correspond to a membership of 14 758 for 1843. Manchester's contributions were sent generally on a fortnightly basis. Their weekly average totaled £15, producing an annual figure of £776 which would suggest a membership of around 15 000. Leeds collected weekly on average a sum of £3 which would correspond to a membership of 3120.

These figures compare favourably with the numbers of the total Irish population in the northern towns at this time. Manchester's Irish-born population in 1841 amounted to 30 304; the Liverpool Irish were 49 639 in number and Leeds contained 5027 Irish-born individuals in the same census year.<sup>214</sup> It would be inaccurate, however, to use these population figures as anything more than a rough guide to the importance of Repeal for the Irish community, as interest in the cause was not limited to the Irish-born and the census can tell us little about the second generation Irish.

It is also important to recognise that these numbers relate to subscribing members only. Many more people who failed, for one reason or another, to pay their subscriptions would have considered themselves to be Repealers. Committed Repealers would have carried the message home to their wives, families, fellow tenants, and neighbours. These figures are high when one considers the financial pressure these communities were under. On many occasions, contributions were accompanied by assurances that if not for pressing economic circumstances, the amounts would have been far higher:

'Although the Irishmen of Stockport have not as yet come forward in the glorious cause of their country's regeneration as has been done in other towns it is not owing either to apathy or to a want of feeling for the degradation and misery to which Ireland has been reduced by the accursed union. The circumstances of the working population of this town have been of late very much reduced in consequence of the depression of trade so that many of them have been out of employment altogether and nearly all partially so. In a short time however, it will be found that they will not allow themselves to be excelled by their countrymen in any other place either in spirit or in

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<sup>213</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 5th July 1842.

<sup>214</sup> J. Papworth, 'The Irish in Liverpool 1835-1871: Segregation and Dispersal', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Liverpool, Table 1.1.



patriotism or a firm determination to  
obtain national justice.<sup>215</sup>

In addition to the constraints placed on the finances of Irish communities, they were also under considerable pressure to provide the funds for the extensive building programme of the Church. The Catholic church in Stalybridge, for example, cost four thousand pounds to build, a sum raised largely by the Irish community of that town. Connolly has argued that the opposition of the English Catholic clergy to the Repeal movement can be explained by the concern regarding the diversion of funds from the church building fund to the Dublin headquarters of the association.<sup>216</sup>

The membership of the Repeal movement reflected the nature of the Irish community in general: that is, a large working class contingent, with a very small but visible middle class element. Many of the leaders of the movement were drawn from the latter group. Duggan and Smyth ran successful manufacturing operations; Daniel Ryan in Manchester was a barrister, his associate Dr James Eager was a physician; and Terence Bellew MacManus operated a shipping business. Just like the poorer Irish who spurned class based movements such as Chartism and Trade Unionism in favour of those which expressed their ethnic interests, these individuals resisted the temptation to develop a self-satisfied apathy towards Ireland which might have accorded better with their middle class status and aspirations. Smyth made this point about the successful Liverpool-based publican, John Langan:

'Unlike many of those who have risen from the humblest walks of life to the ranks of the affluent, his love of country and democratic spirit did not evaporate as his wealth increased. On the contrary the evidence of his natural feelings and the liberality of his pecuniary contributions have always kept pace with his increasing prosperity and instead of clinging to the skirts of aristocratic society and courting its favour by sneering at everything laudable of an Irish character as others are want to do without half his talents or temptations for fashionable life, he has remained ever faithful to the interests of his countrymen in

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<sup>215</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16th September 1840.

<sup>216</sup> G. Connolly, *thesis*, p. 395

Within the movement, there is evidence to suggest that ability and commitment to the cause were of greater importance than social position. Although a significant number of the leadership were drawn from the middle class, many prominent figures came from a more humble background such as Henry Molloy, silk weaver and Head Warden of Leeds. The presence of Irish clergy among the leadership indicates the strong relationship between Irish politics and the Catholic faith and suggests that political affiliation had perhaps more to do with religion than with class background. Priests were at the forefront of the movement across the north of England. Early in 1843 after some 'bickerings and differences among themselves', Daniel Hearne called together the Repealers of Manchester, 'as an Irish priest', and was requested to put himself at their head.<sup>218</sup> Hearne threw himself behind the movement, despite the disapproval of his superiors and led several deputations from Manchester to the Corn Exchange in Dublin. Other clergy lending their support included Andrew McCartney and Hugh McCormack in Manchester, Reverend M. Trappes in Huddersfield and the Reverend J. Dowdall in Bolton.

Of the rank and file membership of the movement, several subgroups deserve special mention. Occupational groups were generally hidden within ward divisions, but some occasionally identified themselves. These included navvies, whose work was often carried out in isolated locations, far from any local Repeal branch, thus encouraging them to constitute their own groups.<sup>219</sup> One occupational group singled out for special praise were the saltheavers of Liverpool, a body of ninety Irishmen led by Patrick Brennan, who was also a Repeal warden. In the fourteen months before September 1845, these men subscribed £30 despite their poor wages.<sup>220</sup>

Women had a part to play in the Repeal movement and auxiliary female branches were set up in many towns. In July 1842, a crowded meeting was held in Leeds to propose the formation of such a branch. Speeches were given extolling the virtues of Ireland and demanding every effort of its 'fair daughters' to secure its liberty:

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<sup>217</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 29th October 1842

<sup>218</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 25th June 1844

<sup>219</sup> For example the Chester and Birkenhead railway workers, *Freeman's Journal*, 20th June 1840

<sup>220</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 18th September 1845.

'The call acted like magic upon the meeting, upwards of twenty ladies came forward and offered their services as collectors. This was the signal for a burst of acclamation which was renewed again and again.'<sup>221</sup>

In December 1842, Duggan forwarded a remittance of thirty pounds 'being the subscriptions of six hundred ladies from Manchester and with the former fair contributions making up exactly one thousand ladies from Manchester...enrolled.' A woman selected for particular praise was a Mrs. Watson whose efforts had helped to collect these subscriptions. The remittance was accompanied by an address to the association:

'We the matrons and maids resident in Manchester and Salford - but daughters of Erin - should consider ourselves unworthy of this honour were we to postpone any longer our resolution to join the standard of Repeal and manifest by our contributions our deep sense of its usefulness, our inalienable attachment to fatherland and our unmitigated hatred to those perfidious wretches who have sacrificed our liberties and raised their ill-got fortunes on the ruins of their country's happiness and prosperity.'<sup>222</sup>

This visit by the Manchester Repealer Luke Healy to the meeting of the national organisation in Dublin was by no means an isolated event. The L.N.R.A was a highly centralised organisation, a fact demonstrated by an extensive correspondence and regular reciprocal visits. Individuals such as Healy, Sherlock and Duggan attended meetings on many occasions, carrying subscriptions from their various branches. Deputations were also sent to attend specific events. Both Manchester and Liverpool sent deputations in June 1844, to present addresses on the subject of O'Connell's recent arrest. Four hundred Repealers from Liverpool were present at the meeting at Tara in August 1843, and the same number set out from Manchester for the abortive meeting at Clontarf in October of that year.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9th July 1842.

<sup>222</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 22nd December 1840. The 'ladies' were reminded of their position by Mr O'Connell, however when Mr Luke Healy directed the address principally to the women present in the Corn Exchange: 'I beg to correct Mr Healy. It is the rule in this room never to address the ladies, by directing our words specially to them; for although we are most happy in being cheered and honoured by their presence amongst us, still they are not considered to be present.

<sup>223</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16th August 1843, 9th October 1843.

The highly centralised nature of the movement was also demonstrated in the matter of discipline. Daniel O'Connell and his nephew W. J. O'Connell, who acted as Inspector-General of Repeal Wardens in Britain, had no qualms about suspending or striking wayward Repealers from the Repeal register if necessity demanded it. Several disciplinary problems arising within the British association led the central committee to note 'there is a most preposterous disposition to quarrel with each other among the Repeal Wardens in Great Britain.'<sup>224</sup> Most of these problems were related to administration. A dispute arose in Liverpool in December 1844, over the accounts and a difference of opinion as to whether the town should be divided into more wards.<sup>225</sup> In Leeds in April 1843, it was discovered that two sets of Repeal Wardens were acting independently of each other.<sup>226</sup> On both occasions the matter was swiftly dealt with by senior members of the movement, who carried out investigations and submitted reports to the central committee. Captain Broderick was sent from Dublin to remedy the situation in Liverpool. Those who refused to abide by the decision of the committee were to be 'thrown out if they didn't make reparation.'<sup>227</sup> W. J. O'Connell promised to settle the matter in Leeds and stated his determination to 'disclaim both parties if they didn't come under the usual rules and regulations.'<sup>228</sup> Such extensive contact between Repealers in Britain and the parent association in Dublin confirms that the British organisation remained an integral part of the organisation as a whole rather than developing along separate lines.

### **Conclusion**

The Repeal organisation in Britain presents a clear example of the importance of identity as a determining factor in the lives of the Irish Catholic community. The deep interest taken in the movement by the Irish Catholics in the northern towns demonstrates their abiding concern for the welfare of their native land. The correspondence of the movement testifies to the desire of many Irish immigrants to maintain close links with home, and in many cases expresses their ultimate desire to return. The use of Biblical metaphors of exile have their roots in the collective memory of oppression which precipitated a natural antipathy to the host country and its people. The bitterly sectarian atmosphere, prevalent in Ireland from the turn of the century, polarised the country and made it impossible for Irishmen of both religious persuasions to visualise any common destiny even as newcomers in English society. Lessons learned at home determined attitudes abroad and this placed Catholic and

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<sup>224</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11th April 1843.

<sup>225</sup> *The Nation*, 7th December 1844.

<sup>226</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11th April 1843.

<sup>227</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14th January 1845.

<sup>228</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11th April 1843.

Protestant Irish at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Irish Protestantism placed great emphasis on the defence of Church and State and thus allied itself with the Tory/Orange faction. Irish Catholics, following the example of their leader, lent their support to a more Liberal/Reformist brand of politics, although their interests remained synonymous with those of their homeland. The association of Englishman and Protestant, so deeply engraved on the Irish Catholic consciousness, and the apparent toleration of Orangeism by the Establishment, would have provoked little desire among the Irish for increased contact with their English neighbours. .

## Chapter Five

### Irish Immigrant Involvement in Ethnically-based Secret Societies



In the previous chapter, the role of Irish immigrants in public politics in Britain was examined. In the following, their importation of what Foster has termed 'a more visceral kind of politics', that is, the Ribbon movement, will be considered and interpreted.<sup>229</sup> This organisation, which functioned variously as defence league, trade union, guerilla movement, Catholic club and organised crime unit, by its very existence in England, demonstrates the strength of identity among immigrants. Their involvement helped them to maintain connections with home and to reinforce bonds with one other. The movement promoted association on the grounds of ethnicity.

From an early stage, historians have been equivocal in their consideration of Ribbonism, as can be seen from the statement of A. M. Sullivan, a historian and journalist writing in the 1870s:

'...there is to this hour the widest conflict of assertion and conclusion as to what exactly were its real aims its origin, structure, character and purpose.'<sup>230</sup>

Indeed, one could hardly blame historians, when contemporary politicians and law enforcers were equally unable to arrive at conclusions. Part of the reason for this doubt was that the society was by its nature secretive; therefore any information concerning it is limited and incomplete. Furthermore, the government had to rely for this limited information upon spies and paid informants, a distasteful and often unreliable practice. Garvin also suggests that the tendency to underrate Ribbonism was a reflection of the 'upper-class contempt for the activities of a despised social class' who made up its numbers.<sup>231</sup> A letter from stipendiary magistrate Hill Rowan, to Dublin's Chief of Police, O'Ferrall, in June 1839, reveals their difference of opinion over the relative importance of Ribbonism:

'Mr O'Ferrall is of the opinion, as I apprehend his views, that Ribbonism is a conspiracy for mere local objects, without reference to any general design against the state. I am persuaded that

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<sup>229</sup> R. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1690 - 1972*, (Penguin, London, 1988), p. 292

<sup>230</sup> A.M. Sullivan, *New Ireland: Political Sketches and Personal Reminiscences of Thirty Years of Irish Public Life* (Cameron Ferguson, Glasgow, 1877, Reprinted, London, 1929), p. 33.

<sup>231</sup> T. Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland', *Past & Present*, no. 96, 1982, p. 154.

the real aim of its heads, whoever they may be, is, when matters are ripe for such purpose, to overturn the constitution altogether, while you as I understand your sentiments, hold something of an intermediate opinion - now this, at least, I think is clear, that my view of the matter as imposing a necessity for greater energy, exertion and circumspection, is the safest for the state and therefore, I am most anxious that we should take up the investigation as a matter of the first importance..'<sup>232</sup>

One of the problems encountered in achieving an understanding of Ribbonism, is its degree of separation from other peasant organisations which proliferated at the end of the eighteenth-century. The term 'Ribbonism' was often used as an umbrella classification for any local peasant agitation and, therefore, a proper understanding of its nature was missed. Galen Broeker has separated these organisations into three categories: agrarian secret societies, religious societies and local factions, noting sufficient differences to categorise the Ribbonmen separately as a religious society.<sup>233</sup> In reality, however, Ribbonism was 'multi-functional' and shared characteristics with all these different types of organisation.<sup>234</sup> Indeed, as Garvin argues, this added to the confusion and dismissal of the society:

'Ribbonism and kindred organisations answer, or pretend to answer, the needs of a variety of different groups and can have many functions: they may serve as leagues for communal defence, as trade unions, as campaign organisations at elections, as the nuclei of guerilla movements, as vehicles by which the outcastes are exploited by their fellow caste members, or as vehicles for ordinary criminal activity...It is this morally ambiguous and multi-functional aspect of Ribbonism which has led to such confusion.'<sup>235</sup>

As a religious society, 'sectarianism provided the structural foundation for collective action'.<sup>236</sup> The society was exclusively Catholic and this criterion was apparently 'the only

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<sup>232</sup> CO/904/7/266

<sup>233</sup> G. Broeker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1970) p. 7

<sup>234</sup> John Belchem, "Freedom and Friendship to Ireland": Ribbonism in Early Nineteenth-Century Liverpool', *International Review of Social History*, 39, 1994, p. 36.

<sup>235</sup> T. Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland', *Past & Present*, 96, 1982, pg. 150.

<sup>236</sup> Belchem, *op. cit.* pg.36

universally prevalent feature' of the society.<sup>237</sup> The existence of militant Irish Catholic societies in Britain puts a different complexion on the occurrence of sectarian violence. Many of the clashes between Orangemen and Catholic Irish in Britain may have been more organised than first appeared. The Catholic reaction to Orange provocation was perhaps less the indiscriminate and spontaneous violence associated with Irish 'character', and more a coordinated and considered protest. Riots which took place in Airdrie in July 1835 could easily have been dismissed as a spontaneous Catholic attack on Orange marchers. In reality, however, once the Orangemen had announced their intention to march, the local Ribbon leader had 'mustered the Glasgow party of Ribbonmen, marched them to Airdrie and been active in leading on and directing the Rioters.'<sup>238</sup>

Broeker's first category of agrarian secret societies included groups like the Whiteboys, Rightboys, Oakboys, and Steelboys, who were particularly strong in the late eighteenth-century. The Whiteboy movement originated in Munster in 1760, as a violent campaign against evictions, low wages and tithes. These were oath-bound societies which made use of threatening letters and attacks on cattle and property to achieve their ends. They were agrarian protectionist societies and were, therefore, economic in motivation. In common with these groups, Ribbonism shares an important position in Irish labour history. The special commission held in Clare in 1831 stated its function as 'compelling standards of prices; preventing strangers coming in and preventing the transfer of property'.<sup>239</sup> Judge Moore explained that the 'object of these turbulent associations, is not to relieve the poor but would appear to be to introduce new systems, by force and intimidation to compel a new standard of prices in all local matters - to preclude the introduction of strangers amongst the agricultural and labouring classes and to prevent the alienation and transfer of property.' In 1837, T. M. Ray, Secretary of the National Trades Political Union and future Secretary of the Repeal Association, wrote to O'Connell to convey information about the Ribbon society and, in doing so, explained the manner in which the Dublin system of friendship was extended by the boatmen along the canals and by the country people.<sup>240</sup> In his statement concerning his employer, the rogue Ribbon master Robert McDonnell, John Kelly explained one of the reasons for the strength of the society as being the mutual support they received in getting employment for each other.<sup>241</sup> The sessional solicitor stated at the close of the sessions of 1839, 'that Ribbonism at present does not partake of

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<sup>237</sup> A.M.Sullivan, *New Ireland*, (London, 1929), pg. 34

<sup>238</sup> CO/904/7/415-6

<sup>239</sup> Special Commission of O & T Clare, 1831

<sup>240</sup> CO/904/7/72

<sup>241</sup> CO/904/7/77

any religious distinctions or of any party arising from religious motives and is more in its nature of combination such as tradesmen enter into'.<sup>242</sup>

The protection provided through combination, no doubt, had a great appeal for the Irish in Britain, who were subject to the resentment and hostility of their working class neighbours. As Sullivan has noted, Ribbonism offered Irishmen in England 'the advantages of a league offensive and defensive in a species of trade unionism'.<sup>243</sup> On Liverpool's dockside, Ribbonism was used by Irish dock workers who threatened outsiders with violence in order to establish a monopoly of the job market.<sup>244</sup> Ribbonism also provided networks of employment and trade. In September 1840, an informant from Carrick-on-Shannon gaol, in explaining the origin of Ribbon societies among the Dublin porters, stated that, 'these parties in order to keep trade among themselves had cant or passwords and would beat any other without them so that they drew fear on many of the dealers in Dublin'.<sup>245</sup> The Ribbon vows included dealing exclusively with each other where possible:

'That in town and country I will give the preference of my money in dealing to those attendant to our national interest according as circumstances may answer'.<sup>246</sup>

Ribbon societies also functioned as friendly societies or labour leagues, offering benefit and protection to both unskilled workers and artisans. The Ribbon societies offered tramp relief, unemployment and sickness and death benefits to members, regardless of skill or trade. Protection was relatively affordable, the admission cost was usually one shilling, with quarterly payments of either threepence or sixpence.<sup>247</sup> William Henegan, a contractor on the Edinburgh to Glasgow railway, when questioned over a document found on his person concerning the 'national system of friendship', described his group as a friendly society. In explaining its origins, he stated that 'he and some others, working men in and about Glasgow, natives of Ireland, resolved to form some time ago, the object of which was to provide a fund for the relief of their indigent brethren when sick, or unable to work or out of employment'.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> CO/904/7/517

<sup>243</sup> A.M.Sullivan, *New Ireland*, pg. 45

<sup>244</sup> Belchem, *op. cit.* pg. 37

<sup>245</sup> CO/904/8/177

<sup>246</sup> CO/904/8/185

<sup>247</sup> Belchem, *op. cit.* p. 41

<sup>248</sup> CO/904/7/433

Ribbon societies often used their role as benefit societies as a cover for their more controversial activities. One such cover was The Liverpool Hibernian Benevolent Burial Society, which operated from The Grapes Inn, Grayson Street, a well known Ribbon headquarters. Members were required to pay an admission fee of four shillings and a further 1/3d every monthly meeting night. After a period of twelve months, a sick member was entitled to six shillings a week for three months, providing he was not in arrears. On the death of a member, the sum of five pounds was allowed for his funeral expenses.<sup>249</sup> A government spy named Rorke reported from Liverpool that:

'...most of the societies to which my informant was introduced are legally constituted as benefit clubs with the approbation of Mr Todd Pratt but it is from a select few of these that emanate the chief proceedings of the Ribbons'<sup>250</sup>

Kelly, in his evidence against McDonnell, explained that a similar practice took place in Dublin. Each lodge had a book with the names of the members which was obtained from the clergy as collection books and arranged as a charitable subscription book. In order to save appearances each member paid a penny each week which was entered in the book and paid at the Chapel. This book lay open on the table so that if interrupted the book could be presented as evidence of their lawful nature as a charitable society. No other written documentation was retained except the form of oath which was kept by the Captain of the lodge.<sup>251</sup>

Ribbon networks facilitated labour mobility through the payment of tramp relief, which was made up from quarterly charges from each branch and distributed from the branch funds by the county delegate. Members travelling to England were supplied with 'certificates', that is, small pieces of paper with a meaningful, but apparently innocent inscription, such as:

'My sheep hear my voice and I know them and I give them life everlasting and they shall not perish forever and no man shall snatch them out of my hands. Let the love of brotherhood abide in you and forget not hospitality.'<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> CO/904/7/174

<sup>250</sup> CO/904/8/37. Mr John Todd Pratt was the barrister appointed to certify rules of savings' banks.

<sup>251</sup> CO/904/7/77ff

<sup>252</sup> CO/904/7/77ff

This certificate would also include, in designated places, the name, or initials of the delegate and of the parish master, the place and date of receipt and a private mark. Despite the huge cost of tramp relief, any individual in possession of such a certificate was entitled to assistance. This process was the same for emigrants leaving for America where secret societies such as The Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Molly Maguires achieved considerable notoriety. One informant who was responsible for giving the 'goods' to emigrants going from Sligo to America described the process:

'The American signs and passwords are sent over to the general meeting of the delegates here and they are distributed to the county delegates who distribute them to the emigrants going to America, together with signs and passwords of the Irish Ribbon lodges which they take with them and they are admitted to the American lodges. They pay sixpence here for the certificates which admits them into all the American lodges.'<sup>253</sup>

In this way, the Ribbon societies helped to maintain relationships among Irish immigrants, despite high levels of mobility. Contacts made through the Ribbon organisation facilitated the transfer of labour from place to place. Ribbon societies functioned like a trade society, which complemented networks already established around kinship and neighbourhood and provided members with employment and housing. The transient nature of the Irish immigrant, therefore, did not necessarily diminish his Irish identity, as it was possible to travel from one Irish community to another. The Ribbon network indicates the strength of connections between communities in the north of England. Members travelled with regularity from one town to another. A letter from Michael Hanlon in Liverpool, to Richard Jones, the Secretary of the Leinster branch of the Ribbonmen in 1839, for example, describes the movement of a Mr. Pat Gannon between Preston and Liverpool.<sup>254</sup> Patrick McDonnell of Swanlinbar visited his brethren in England in 1839, telling of his recent arrest and resulting financial difficulties in an effort to raise money. According to an informant, McDonnell had written from Glasgow to Liverpool, to say he intended to travel around the north of England, and his request for mail to be directed to Whitehaven suggested he had already begun this tour. He was voted considerable sums of money in Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield and at 'some smaller places he got sums in

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<sup>253</sup> CO/904/8/407

<sup>254</sup> Jones' notebook, Hanlon, 20th August 1839.



proportion'.<sup>255</sup> The extent and success of this 'tour' demonstrates the strength of the Ribbon network and the depth of communication between branches in different areas. Another well known Ribbonman, Owen Carolan, the delegate for Leitrim, visited St Helens in 1840.<sup>256</sup> John Rochford, who replaced Patrick Hely as a delegate in Manchester, lived in Crosby Street, Liverpool, with Hugh McAnulty, ale house keeper and delegate for that town, thus suggesting a strong connection between these branches.<sup>257</sup> This can also be demonstrated by the fact that Peter Young of Manchester shared the position of national delegate for England conjointly with John McArdle of Liverpool.<sup>258</sup> Decyphers of information ascertained by Drummond contained lists of Dublin accounts which show the extent of communication between Ribbonmen there and in England;<sup>259</sup>

1838		£ s d
March 5th	Stewart from Liverpool	2 7 1/2
March 13th	paid postage of a letter from Liverpool	- 8 -
March 27th	William Armstrong from Liverpool	- 4 -
	John Redmonds from Manchester	- 6 -
March 29th	paid postage of a letter from Liverpool	- 8 -
	(This occurs frequently)	
October 1st	Paid expenses of three persons going to Liverpool	5 9 2
October 7th	Two men from Belfast & two from England	7 1 -
April 9th	Received from the friends in Liverpool per post	2 - -

Of all the agrarian organisations in existence at the end of the eighteenth-century, Ribbonism, being more organised than the Whiteboy movement and sharing their nationalist aspirations, most closely resembled Defenderism. Cornwall Lewis, for example, argued in 1836, that the Ribbonmen were thus their descendents.<sup>260</sup> The Defenders first made their appearance in 1792, when a number of arms-raids took place in the Cavan-Monaghan border region. At the same time, evidence of oath taking was brought to the attention of the authorities, who soon came to understand that this movement was much more organised and ideologically based than previous groups. Their grievances included taxation and tithes. Land redistribution was demanded, as were low rents for potato patches and this agenda was infused with memories of the Stewart cause. The

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<sup>255</sup> CO/904/7/376

<sup>256</sup> CO/904/8/79

<sup>257</sup> CO/904/8/121

<sup>258</sup> CO/904/8/13

<sup>259</sup> CO/904/7/317

<sup>260</sup> George Cornwall Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland*, (London, 1836).

Defenders, like the Ribbonmen, had their roots in sectarianism and their origin was more specifically related to the competition for land between those of different religious persuasions within the linen producing economy of Armagh. Though the roots of the movement in some areas went back to the sectarian feuding in the 1790s, and it would eventually take a strongly Catholic line, due to the Catholic Church were resented as well. Several sectarian attacks by the Protestant Peep o' Day Boys proved the authorities to be ineffectual. Falling living standards went together with heightened Protestant aggression and persuaded elements within the Catholic community of the necessity of defending themselves. Defenderism developed an anti-state, anti-Protestant ideology and also absorbed a degree of French republicanism.<sup>261</sup> Their oaths stressed egalitarianism and consecration to the National Convention and the Liberty Tree, but their iconography harked back to the Treaty of Limerick and the Battle of the Boyne, in a way that divided them from radical Presbyterian allies. The United Irishmen attempted to harness Defender enthusiasm, and influenced the movement with their own secular ideology, but Defenderism already had a national outlook.

Ribbonism shared this embryonic nationalism. Beames goes as far as to say that the 'Ribbonmen expected to participate in an imminent nationalist uprising'. This nationalist sentiment, he argued, was nourished not only by the memory of 1798, but also by their position as Catholics under a Protestant ascendancy.<sup>262</sup> The notebook of Richard Jones, one of the Ribbon leaders, was 'full of allusions essentially political in character'.<sup>263</sup> In April 1838, Jones wrote to an official in England asking whether the Ribbonmen there were 'interested in the welfare of their country' and if they were prepared to 'unite and free' their 'native land'.<sup>264</sup> A letter sent in August 1838, from Jones to William Wilson, delegate for Liverpool, stated that the motto of their group was 'the good of our country and to remove the brand of slavery from the forehead of Irishmen'.<sup>265</sup> A letter from Jones and Dardis to the Ribbonmen of Ulster in May 1838, expresses their happiness that 'the men of your country (hasten) to the interest of our native land'.<sup>266</sup> A letter sent from Glasgow in November 1839, lamented the 'self-interest' which often obscured the 'patriotism' which was their real focus.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> T. Garvin, *op. cit.* p. 143

<sup>262</sup> M. Beames, 'The Ribbon Societies: Lower Class Radicalism in pre-Famine Ireland, *Past & Present*, No. 97, 1982, p. 136

<sup>263</sup> A.M. Sullivan, *op. cit.* p. 36

<sup>264</sup> Jones notebook, Jones, 24th April 1838

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, Jones, 19th August 1838

<sup>266</sup> CO/904/7/315.

<sup>267</sup> CO/904/7/356-369

The toasts drunk at Ribbon society meetings also often had political overtones. Rowan reported on meetings held in County Down, on the 9th and 10th February 1840, at which members of the 22nd, 88th and 97th regiment were present and the toasts ran:

Here's to O'Connell and the army, as he  
was the best front the army had and that  
it would be at his command.'

and:

'O'Connell and the army. They are the  
men who know how to use their arms  
for him when he wanted them.'<sup>268</sup>

The passwords sworn to by the informant John Gilhooly, in Mohill in August 1841, included the following:

'The nation is in distress.  
Yes, we should be partakers in their  
sorrows...  
May the sons of old Erin be true to the  
cause,  
And strive to assist those who are under  
the laws.'<sup>269</sup>

Again passwords used in Sligo included:

'What do you think of the Tory  
ministry?  
I think they will crush the rights of  
Irishmen.'<sup>270</sup>

Garvin has demonstrated through maps derived from Castle sources that Ribbonism also resembled Defenderism in its distribution.<sup>271</sup> Neither society is present south of a line drawn across the centre of the island from Dublin to Galway. Richard Jones, the secretary of the Dublin Ribbonmen described the distribution of the society in 1839, in a way which makes clear that networks were considerably weaker in the southern regions of the island.

E. Rorke, a government spy, writes from Liverpool:

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<sup>268</sup> CO/904/8/54

<sup>269</sup> CO/904/8/185

<sup>270</sup> CO/904/8/325

<sup>271</sup> Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others', p. 138 - 141.

'I should beg leave to submit to your Lordship a communication made to me relating to the proceedings of the Ribbon society in the country, by which you will perceive that it has its branches in Scotland, as also in other districts of England where many of the low Irish are located.'<sup>272</sup>

Rorke's informant was P. H. McGloin, an Irish businessman in the wool trade, who was to provide the government with most of its information concerning Ribbonism in England. He declared that Ribbonism existed 'to a considerable extent in Liverpool and Manchester' and 'proportionably in many of the smaller towns of Lancashire, Cheshire, the Potteries and the confines of Yorkshire'. These places held communication with the board in Ireland through the national delegate of England in Liverpool, but the more northerly branches such as Newcastle received their instruction through the Scottish delegate in Glasgow.<sup>273</sup> Peter Keogh of Tullamore, former delegate of King's County, turned informer, stated that the Ribbon society was active in many counties of Ireland and, from reports, had no doubts that it existed to a 'great extent in both England and Scotland but more particularly in the towns of Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow.'<sup>274</sup> The bulk of the evidence regarding the Ribbon society in England concerns the 1830s and more particularly the latter years of that decade. Details for the 1820s are more hazy, but it would appear that energy was focused on creating a national organisation, a project retarded by internal suspicion and arrests. McGloin, writing in May 1840, looked back a decade to demonstrate the decline of Ribbonism, and in doing so gave a valuable indication of Ribbon strength in the 1830s:

'A member 10 years ago to rejoin now would at once notice the change, for instance Liverpool in 1833 had 30 different branches of the northern society in active operation- There are now but 20 and many very weak, numbering not more than 20 members. The most numerous is No. 19 of which the writer is master which numbers about 100. Again at the time I speak of the number of emblems ordered on the 17<sup>th</sup> March approached 2000. On the

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<sup>272</sup> CO/904/7/343

<sup>273</sup> CO/904/7/345

<sup>274</sup> CO/904/7/394-6

last 17th they did not exceed 800..Again on the death of a member from '32 to '35 it was usual to form a procession at the funeral which at times amounted to many hundreds. Such a thing is now unknown. The committee in particular at the same period numbered many respectable tradesmen and was consequently very orderly – it is now the reverse - consisting of labourers, warehousemen and lumbers and valued only by an occasional publican.<sup>275</sup>

In its organisation, Ribbonism again resembled Defenderism. The Defender system was based on the local lodge, and alehouse keepers, hedge schoolmasters, artisan, pedlars were involved in developing its networks. It was an oath-bound society with committee men levying fees for oath taking. The Ribbonmen were organised in local lodges and then at parish, county, provincial and national level.<sup>276</sup> Lodges were restricted to thirty six members, in addition to the master, two committee men and a treasurer. When a group exceeded this number they were ordered to form another lodge. Each lodge was required to meet on a monthly basis, under the instruction of the four officers.<sup>277</sup> The officers from each 'body' formed the general committee of the town and also met on a monthly basis, after the body meetings had taken place on the second Wednesday of each month. The master of each body, or one of his officers (with special permission) formed the Select, which dealt with matters of discipline and emergency. The general committee of the town appointed the delegate quarterly, the process of re-election being observed, for the sake of democracy, although in reality the individual was rarely changed. One or two delegates were selected by the parish groups to represent the county. The responsibilities of the county delegate included corresponding with the national board in Ireland, attending the quarterly meeting, or 'market', where passwords and signs ('goods') were handed out and distributing them to the various masters.<sup>278</sup>

Signs and passwords enabled members to recognise one another and in content resembled the republican sentiments popular in revolutionary France. The 'goods' included separate passwords for members and committee men, quarelling words which were used to prevent discord among brothers, and signs, or reciprocal physical movements. The following 'goods' were given by McGloin for the third quarter of 1840, sent from Ireland:

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<sup>275</sup> CO/904/8/82-84

<sup>276</sup> CO/904/7/345-347

<sup>277</sup> CO/904/8/309

<sup>278</sup> CO/904/7/346-347

'Passwords

Q - Have you got any news?

A - The weather has been wet.

Q - I hope you will have a good harvest.

A - It would be much wanting.

Officers' Words

May the lovers of friendship never go asking and banish informers quite out of the way.

Quarelling Words

You have struck me sir!

I did not intend it.

Sign - hat lifted slightly off with right hand

Answer - similar movement with the left<sup>279</sup>

Evidence for Ribbon activity prior to the 1830s is mostly contained within the reports of Major Henry Charles Sirr, the head of Dublin police. This evidence is particularly confusing and contradictory, often, by Sirr's own admission, 'not born out by the facts'.<sup>280</sup> Despite these limitations, however, it is clear that a well organised society with a sophisticated structure was in place at this time. The trials which followed from this police surveillance had a devastating effect on the Ribbonism. From this point onwards, the organisation split into two factions, one based in Ulster, the other in Leinster. A letter from Ray to O'Connell dated November 1837, described the situation thus: 'the entire kingdom is divided into two great sections one called the northern unionists - this is the less extensive - and the other now called the Irish Sons of Freedom; this latter is the more organised and formidable.'<sup>281</sup> The reasons for the split are unclear. What is apparent is that the system was very open to abuse and corruption, which led to an uneasy and mistrustful atmosphere. A letter and a series of resolutions drawn up by the Glasgow Ribbonmen acknowledged these weaknesses:

'(It) is the opinion of the Friends general, that the cause of the oppression and contentions arising between the delegates, is on account of the large salaries connected with the office of delegate and not from any pure motive'<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> CO/904/8/235

<sup>280</sup> Trinity College Dublin, Sirr Papers, 869/1/332

<sup>281</sup> CO/904/7/72ff

<sup>282</sup> CO/904/7/365



Rivalry for delegate positions attended a delegate meeting in June 1840, held at Ballyhilland near Swanlinbar, where the chairman and committee heard the complaints. These complaints were concerned either with the expropriation of funds, or with arguments between members of the same body over who was entitled to receive the goods. The solutions to these disagreements and corrupt practices were very difficult to find and demonstrate the vulnerability of the Ribbon system.<sup>283</sup> Robert McDonnell, a Dublin broguemaker and lodge master, provided himself with an income of three pounds a week, by not only swearing in new members but by initiating 'masters' in an illegal action. When tried by the society, the charges against him also included: divulging passwords; not being a Catholic; (he had been seen eating meat on prescribed days and was cohabiting with a woman) and being 'a thief and a robber and unfit for the society of any honest or honourable man and only waiting for his chance to betray his associates.' A grand meeting was held in Dublin to consider the charges and he was sentenced to be cashiered for one quarter. This lenient sentence reflected their desire to remove him quietly, since they were 'afraid to put him off entirely at that time, lest he might inform upon them and intending to get rid of him quietly.'<sup>284</sup>

This vulnerability led to very cautious proceedings in terms of the introduction of new members, as McGloin said:

'Much precaution is used in the introduction of members. None but Roman Catholics being admissable and a report list with the names, ages and residence - the parish and county where each candidate comes from - must be read out in each body and afterwards in the general committee of the town. None are admitted whose name and character are not known to at least two bodies or branches, that is, each must be passed in two or more bodies and afterwards approved in the General Committee, should objection or cross be made to any - it must go before the Select and, upon due scrutiny, is approved or rejected.'<sup>285</sup>

The arrest in 1839 of Richard Jones, a clerk to a salesmaster in Dublin's Smithfield market, provided the government with a breakthrough in their attempts to understand and defeat Ribbonism. Jones, who was charged with involvement in a combination murder in 1836,

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<sup>283</sup> CO/904/8/159-161

<sup>284</sup> CO/904/7/77ff

<sup>285</sup> CO/904/7/345

had on his person and in his house various notebooks containing shorthand writing, which, when decyphered, appeared to be a copy of the correspondence carried on between himself and others in different parts of Ireland and Liverpool. It became clear that Jones and a man named Andrew Dardis were, as secretary and President respectively, the 'principal managers of the concern' known as the Leinster Society or the Irish Sons of Freedom.<sup>286</sup> These notebooks also provided considerable information concerning the parallel organisation, that is, the Northern branch, known also as the Sons of the Shamrock and The Knights of St Patrick. This group was more significant in terms of membership, probably as a result of the extent of religious rivalry and unease in the area.

Both the Ulster and the Leinster branches of the Ribbon Society were represented in England. The smaller Leinster union, had its headquarters in George Carrick's Tavern, in Newton Hill Street. Thomas Jones of Kildare held the Liverpool presidency until he was removed in 1837, for joining the Oddfellows. His replacement, Kennedy, was also removed from office shortly after his election and was, in turn, replaced by William Wilson, a painter and decorator, who was elected president of this group in 1838. His term of office was, however, plagued with difficulty and competition for power. His leadership was questioned by his predecessor, who was favoured by the Dublin leadership. This situation was only resolved with a full investigation of Wilson's character by Jones and Dardis.<sup>287</sup>

McGloin was more familiar with the Northern Society which was, he explained in 1840, 'instituted on the same principles in opposition' to the Leinster society after an arrest of delegates in Armagh in 1822' and he stated that there were twenty branches of this group meeting in Liverpool on different nights.<sup>288</sup> This larger body was otherwise known as the Sons of the Shamrock or the Knights of St Patrick. The headquarters of this organisation in Liverpool was at The Grapes Inn, Grayson Street, where the 'general box was kept'. This house was kept by Hugh McAnulty, a publican in Grayson Street, and among the Ribbonmen in England 'by far the best known man in Ireland'.<sup>289</sup> McAnulty was a delegate of the society and travelled to the general board meeting in Ireland four or five times. Upon his death in 1836, his widow married another delegate, George Hamill, of Armagh, who

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<sup>286</sup> CO/904/8/299-324

<sup>287</sup> *Jones' Notebook*, Wilson, 11th March 1838, Dardis & Jones, 15th March 1838. This investigation included an account of Wilson's attendance at Mass.

<sup>288</sup> CO/904/8/9 4th January 1840

<sup>289</sup> CO/904/8/79

also took part in the general board three or four times. When he died in 1838, his widow retained the license and maintained the Ribbon connection.<sup>290</sup>

There were between twenty and forty branches in Liverpool and the principal committee houses were reportedly: O'Connor's, Tytheburn Street; Gavin's, Bent Street, and Connolly's, Thomas Street.<sup>291</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, who resided in Croselys Court, was delegate for the town when McClelland visited in January 1840.<sup>292</sup> McGloin stated that this individual had been 'in the concern for twenty years in every office and is known to and knows all the chief leaders and he is now general secretary'. He had also visited the general board in Ireland three or four times.<sup>293</sup> According to McGloin, the best known officers in 1840 were: Peter Doyle, John Doyle, Jerry Doyle, Thomas McConville, Feargus McArdle, and James McCormick. James McCormick and Feargus McArdle were masters of No.5 and No.4 lodges respectively. John Doyle, a tailor residing in Dunbar Street, attended the packages and together with Thomas McConville, another delegate, was a most violent advocate for the continuance of the secret correspondence with Ireland.<sup>294</sup> Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 lodges sat at George Hamill's house and three more lodges held their meetings at the house of Hugh Rooney, at 41 Crosby Street. Barney King was the master of Number 9 lodge which sat at 27 Batchellor Street, the home of William Carabine, and another lodge met in a house close to Vauxhall Road.<sup>295</sup>

In Manchester, McGloin explained, there were twenty four branches and approximately 1400 members, although it appears that further divisions were appearing and numbers declining due to the opposition of local clergy.<sup>296</sup> In Manchester, Peter Young was delegate for the town and shared the position of national delegate with John McArdle of Liverpool.<sup>297</sup> Young, described as 'a tall young man' was, however, obliged to leave Manchester at about this time and travel to Wakefield, in order, as McClelland thought, 'to avoid some individuals coming from Ireland some time since to arrest him'.<sup>298</sup> He was replaced by Patrick Heffernan, a 'low size youngish' labourer, living at 22 Maria Street.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> CO/904/8/118. A letter from the Liverpool Ribbonmen (18th May 1840) signed by John Burns and Pat Cavanagh and directed to Pat Haffigan care of Robert Brock, Little Quay Street, off Deansgate, Manchester, requests that replies should be sent via Mrs Hamill of Grayson Street (CO/904/7/188-9)369)

<sup>291</sup> CO/904/8/79, (McGloin), CO/904/8/349, (Hagan), CO/904/8/118, (McClelland)

<sup>292</sup> CO/904/8/98

<sup>293</sup> CO/904/8/13, CO/904/8/79.

<sup>294</sup> CO/904/8/79

<sup>295</sup> CO/904/8/109

<sup>296</sup> CO/904/8/304. This corrected an earlier estimate which suggested ten times as many members in the city, 'the number of members at Manchester in 1838 appears either to have been a mistake (1400 instead of 14000) or an exaggeration by CD or his informant.

<sup>297</sup> CO/904/8/13

<sup>298</sup> CO/904/8/109

<sup>299</sup> CO/904/8/79

The places of meeting were reportedly Peter Hughes', The Wheatsheaf Inn, Henry Street, and Robert Brock's, Little Quay Street, both public houses. Peter Hughes was described as a middle aged man and 'an old servant'. James Hughes, 'an old man', was master of no.1 division which met at Hughes'. Robert Brock's premises were situated 'off Deansgate' and provided a meeting place for three lodges. Two lodges met at the house of Bernard Hughes in 48 Georges Road, Michael Corrigan was master of no.3, and No. 4 lodge met at 48 Georges Rd.<sup>300</sup> On his visit to Manchester, McClelland stayed mostly at the Swan Inn, Swan Street, which he described as 'constantly full of members of the Ribbon organisation'. The man who placed McClelland in this inn was Patrick Hely, a boot and shoe maker, who spent most of his days in the Swan Inn giving out tickets and regulating the affairs of the society. Hely was soon after removed from office after 'some irregularity' and replaced by a tailor named John Rochford.<sup>301</sup>

One of the main points of conflict between the Northern and Leinster societies in England arose through the interference of their pastors. The clergy were committed to the eradication of Ribbonism, threatening any members of their flock who defied their proscription with excommunication. The Ribbonmen found ways around this, such as confessing their membership before their renewal was due and then, while technically no longer a member, receiving the Sacrament upon absolution.<sup>302</sup> Some members of the northern society in England, such as John McArdle, were, however, uncomfortable with this deception and advocated an acceptance of their Church's demand to end the secret correspondence with Ireland. In addition to dividing the two societies further, this also caused a great deal of internal dispute. McArdle, 'a really decent and honourable man' was put out of office and replaced by one Thomas Burns 'and the consequence was an immediate resolution to resume the correspondence'.<sup>303</sup>

Another cause of conflict between the two Ribbon societies was the issue of dual membership with the Oddfellows. This body was enormously influential in the Liverpool labour market and, therefore, attractive to many Irish. McGloin reported in June 1840 that the Leinster society had applied to form themselves into a branch of the Oddfellows. The northern society, being much more sectarian in outlook, was appalled by this and denounced the Oddfellows and the Foresters as 'no better than Orangemen'.<sup>304</sup> These attempts to keep members contained within an exclusively Irish and Catholic body,

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<sup>300</sup> CO/904/8/109, CO/904/8/79

<sup>301</sup> CO/904/8/120-121

<sup>302</sup> See CO/904/7/269

<sup>303</sup> CO/904/8/76 Letter from McGloin, 23rd April 1840.

<sup>304</sup> CO/904/8/225

demonstrated further by the injunction to deal only with Irish Catholics wherever possible, reinforced feelings of difference among Ribbonmen in England.

Despite these conflicts, considerable energy was devoted during the 1830s to unity discussions between the two networks, as Jones' diary indicates. A meeting was arranged in Belfast on 20th April 1838, at which Michael Young and Richard Jones represented the Leinster Society, in an effort 'to have a final settlement and to have a brotherly love and friendship extended among all Irish Roman Catholics.' Representatives from Antrim, Down, Armagh, Derry, Monaghan, Tyrone and Louth, Leitrim, Longford, Donegal, Fermanagh and Sligo were all to be renewed at this meeting. Following the meeting a letter was sent to Liverpool in order to establish the 'determination of the friends belonging to Hibernians' there:

'If they act for the welfare of their native land they will join with those persons whose wish it is to see their native land free - the motto of every honest Irishman should be 'unite and free your native land'<sup>305</sup>

A joint general board was held in Dublin on July 1st 1838, and was attended by delegates from at least eleven Irish counties and four representatives from Liverpool; that is, Wilson, McConville, Cavanagh and Thomas Burns. At this meeting the societies formerly merged to form the United Irish Sons of Freedom and Sons of the Shamrock.<sup>306</sup> The next meeting was to be held in Liverpool on 30th September, the reason being, 'that it would strike at the root of the evil and as the persons there were from the different counties of Ireland, that they would be able to send information from it to their friends of the folly of any longer being kept separated by any man or men.'<sup>307</sup> Initial optimism proved unfounded, however, for certain members of the northern union, including George Hamill and two other English delegates, arranged a separate meeting in Dundalk in August. The possibility of unity became even more remote when Wilson was replaced as delegate by Michael Hanlon, who mistrusted the northerners and advised Jones to end the dialogue with them.<sup>308</sup>

The presence of informers despatched from Ireland added to mutual hostility and suspicion. As the news came of Jones' arrest all proceedings were suspended although McGloin still maintained that 'though Ribbonism had received a great blow it would be

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<sup>305</sup> Jones' notebook, Jones, 24th April 1838.

<sup>306</sup> Jones' notebook, Wilson, July 1838

<sup>307</sup> Jones' notebook, Jones & Dardis, May 28th 1838.

<sup>308</sup> Jones' notebook, Hanlon, 2nd August 1839



absurd to imagine it is extinguished.<sup>309</sup> After two days of 'drinking and squabbling at the Sefton Arms in St Helens in July 1840, all thirteen delegates representing Bolton, Sheffield, Newcastle, Chester and other northern towns, reported a substantial decline in numbers. In Liverpool, according to McGloin, regular members of the northern union were down to three hundred and twenty in 1840, from a total of 1350 three years previously.<sup>310</sup> The arrest of Jones and the obvious determination of the authorities to stamp Ribbonism out, had a predictably adverse affect on the society. Hugh O'Hare, delegate for Glasgow, stated, in October 1841, that he did not carry printed forms on him 'because these were dangerous times and he would not endanger himself for any man, that no man should have papers about him.'<sup>311</sup> In December 1841, an informer explained that the heavy police presence in Armagh so frightened them that 'no publican would let one of us sit in his house nor give one of us a night's lodging, in consequence of the license being taken.'<sup>312</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Increasing police interference, combined with opposition from the clergy and the popularity of O'Connell's campaign with its conflicting objectives and *modus operandi*, led to the decline of the Ribbon movement in the post 1840 period. Ribbonism retains an important place in the history of Irish nationalism, however, providing a link in the revolutionary tradition between 1798 and the Fenian movement of the 1860's. It is also important to recognise the nationalist overtones of the Ribbon rhetoric. Despite the fact that they failed to organise an all-out rebellion, their correspondence clearly displays a sense of dissatisfaction with the situation in Ireland and with the efficacy of British rule and therefore would suggest that they were a displaced and disgruntled minority.

A focus on ethnic identity was a central feature of the Ribbon societies, with Catholicism a prerequisite for membership and any dealing outside the Catholic community prohibited. In determining the contribution of Ribbonism to the maintenance of ethnic identity among Irish migrants it is crucial to stress the way in which the Society strengthened both the ties with home and among the Irish in different parts of Britain, in spite of their high levels of mobility. The use of certificates facilitated the movement of labour and helped to keep migrants within well established Irish networks across Britain. This Chapter demonstrates the level of communication and movement between one group and another across the North

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<sup>309</sup> CO/904/8/228

<sup>310</sup> CO/904/8/225

<sup>311</sup> CO/904/8/418

<sup>312</sup> CO/904/8/484



of England. The extent of contact is indicated by the position of National Delegate being jointly held for a period by the Manchester and Liverpool delegates.

Chapter Six

The Religious World of Irish Migrants

'The disturbance in Manchester has been so far less than I anticipated. I am determined to carry out the change, even if it be necessary to surround St Patrick's with a cordon of troops and police; the democrats must be made to feel that the church is governed by the authority of the keys and not by popular clamour.'<sup>313</sup>

These grave words, written by Bishop Brown of Liverpool, relate to what Gerard Connolly has called 'the most scandalous ecclesiastical dispute in the recent history of local Catholicism'.<sup>314</sup> The 'change' referred to, was the removal of the Reverend Daniel Hearne from St Patrick's parish, Manchester, the 'democrats' his fellow Irish nationals, who supported their hero in defiance of their Bishop's authority. This chapter will examine how a unique cultural and historical background created an Irish brand of Catholicism that was in many ways at variance with the formal, Tridentine Catholicism favoured in England. These differences, it will be argued, can go some way towards explaining the antipathy of English Catholics towards Irish immigrants. This antipathy has thus far been explained rather negatively, by the lack of regular practice among migrants, which Connolly calls 'the central issue for the clergy of England'. By contrast, this chapter will argue that the English church was equally concerned with the assertiveness of the Irish and their demands for a recognisably Irish organisation of the parish and parish clergy.<sup>315</sup> Several scholars have noted that the Irish never gained control of the English church in the same way as they did in Australia, New Zealand and America. But they have failed to take adequate account of the attempts of the Irish to assert themselves and stamp their own mark on the English church, together with the determination of the English to prevent this from happening.<sup>316</sup> It is also the aim of this chapter to examine the extent to which differences of opinion between Irish and English Catholics contributed to an increasing introversion among the Irish and reproduced a distinct Irish identity. This chapter has focused on Irish Catholic immigrants because data on Irish Protestant communities has proved difficult to uncover, suggesting that they were less differentiated from the English Protestant population than their Catholic countrymen.

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<sup>313</sup> Leeds Diocesan Archives, (L.D.A) Briggs correspondence no.1612, Bishop Brown of Liverpool to Bishop Briggs of Beverley, November, 1845.

<sup>314</sup> G. Connolly, 'The Transubstantiation of Myth: Towards a new popular history of nineteenth century Catholicism in Britain', Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 35, 1984, p. 90.

<sup>315</sup> G. Connolly, 'Irish and Catholic: Myth and Reality', in R. Swift and S. Gilley, (eds) The Irish in the Victorian City, (1985), p. 204.

<sup>316</sup> M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain, Problems of Integration', in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds) The Irish in the Victorian City, (1985), p. 88

Considerable scholarly attention has been given to religion in Ireland in the nineteenth-century, which is of great assistance to an understanding of the religious attitudes of Irish migrants.<sup>317</sup> Much of the debate centres around Emmet Larkin's thesis of the 'devotional revolution', which refers to the intensification of devotion in the post-Famine era, a process attributed to the influence of Cardinal Paul Cullen and to the psychological trauma surrounding the Famine.<sup>318</sup> By the early twentieth century, Catholics were generally regarded as scrupulous in observation but this contrasted sharply with the statistics on church attendance collected by the 1834 commission for public instruction. These figures have been examined by D. W. Miller, who has concluded that average attendance figures in rural areas ranged from 60% to 20%, and only in the towns were attendance rates comparable with modern figures.<sup>319</sup>

If the twenty three areas he selects are in any way representative, then average attendance for the whole country did not exceed 40% of the total Catholic population. The population from which the migrants were drawn was, according to these estimates, largely non-practicing. Lynn Lees has estimated that the level of practice among Catholics in Victorian London never exceeded 30% of total baptised population.<sup>320</sup> Gerard Connolly has concluded that in the boom towns of the North - Manchester, Wigan, Huddersfield, Leeds, Bradford, Sunderland and Newcastle - probably fewer than 30% were acquainted with the discipline of modern Tridentine conformism in the years 1790 to 1840.<sup>321</sup>

S. J. Connolly has observed that it is necessary to make allowance within these figures for those who were not obliged to attend Sunday Mass, that is, children and the sick and housebound, a group which probably represented a quarter of the total Catholic population.<sup>322</sup> There were also significant social pressures which could keep people away from Mass, such as not having suitable clothing, as a Cork labourer explained to the Poor Law Inquiry commissioners in the mid-1830s:

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<sup>317</sup> See for example E. Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland 1850-75', *American Historical Review*, 77, 1972; D. W. Miller, 'Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine', *Journal of Social History*, IXI, 1975;

S. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780 - 1845*, (Gill & MacMillan, Dublin, 1985) D. H. Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815-1922*, (McGill-Queens University Press, 1988); D. Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-70: a study of Protestant-Catholic relations between the Act of Union and Disestablishment*, (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1978).

<sup>318</sup> E. Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland 1850-75', *American Historical Review*, 77, 1972.

<sup>319</sup> D. W. Miller, 'Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine', *Journal of Social History*, IXI, 1975

<sup>320</sup> L. H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, (1979).

<sup>321</sup> G. Connolly, *op. cit.* (1985), p. 202

<sup>322</sup> S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People*, p. 89

'When a man has nothing but rags on him he has not the courage to go among the people. If he went in among the clean and decent congregation on a Sunday, all the eyes in the chapel would be on him and he could never stand it.'<sup>323</sup>

Carleton gives another example:

"Peggy", said Katty Carroll, to her companion Peggy Donohue, "Were you 'out' (at Mass) last Sunday."  
No in troth Katty, I was disappointed in getting my shoes from Paddy Mellon though I left him the measure of my foot three weeks ago."<sup>324</sup>

Both Connolly and Miller note a variation in levels of practice in different parts of Ireland. In predominantly Irish speaking areas, attendance figures ranged from 20% to 40%, and in English speaking areas from 30% to 60%. These remote Irish speaking districts were also the areas where church accommodation was most inadequate and the clergy were most thinly distributed. A lack of adequate manpower was a problem throughout the country. In the years 1781-1800, the number of priests serving in Ireland increased by only 12%, compared with an 88% increase in population, and in the period 1800-1840, there was a 35% increase in priests, compared with a 51% increase in population.<sup>325</sup> In 1834-5, the number of parishioners to each priest ranged from 1941 in Ferns to 4199 in Tuam. The shortage of priests was most acute in the north-west, west and the south-west, where the population was growing most rapidly. The situation in the towns was generally better than in rural areas. Dublin had a higher rate of priests to people than Cork or Limerick. Belfast, however, was a disaster area, possessing very few resources - here, only a quarter of those bound to hear Mass did so.

As the Catholic Church in England also suffered from a lack of priests and other resources, the migrants faced the same obstacles to the practice of religion in their new homes. The initial lack of churches was often compounded by the failure of Irish Catholics to recognise them as such and by their general unfamiliarity with English Catholicism and foreign priests. Some parts of Ireland in this period had no chapel at all and Mass would be celebrated in the open air. In the diocese of Tuam, for example, there were still nine

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<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89

<sup>324</sup> W. Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, 'The Battle of the Factions', p. 123

<sup>325</sup> S. Connolly, *op. cit.*, p. 33

parishes without a chapel in 1835.<sup>326</sup> Chapels were much less the centre of religious life in Ireland. Confessions ('stations'), baptisms, and marriages took place in the home of the priest or the people. In addition, because the practice of retaining the Host in the Chapel did not develop until the second half of the century, it was only seen as a sacred building at certain times and on particular occasions.

Despite all these extenuating circumstances, however, it must be accepted that many Irish Catholics simply did not see regular attendance at Sunday Mass as a necessary part of their religious life. This fact is illustrated brilliantly in a scene from Carleton's story 'The Station'. Here the Reverend Philemy McGurk, parish priest of Tir-Neer, addressed his people at the end of Mass, informing them of the forthcoming venues for stations:

"Take notice, that the Stations for the following week be held as follows: - ...  
"On Wednesday in Parrah More Slevin's of Mullaghfadh. Are you there Parrah More?" - No answer-  
" Parrah More Slevin of Mullaghfadh?"  
- No reply -  
"Dan Fagan?"  
"Present sir"  
"Do you know what keeps this reprobate from Mass?"  
"I bleeve he's taking advantage sir of the frost to get in his praties today in respect of the bad footin' sir for the horses in the bog when there's not a frost. Any how betune that an' a bit of a sore head he got,  
your Reverence, on Thursday last in takin' part wid the O'Scallaghans agin the Bradys I bleeve he had to stay away today."<sup>327</sup>

This situation provided a sharp contrast with levels of practice among English Catholics. According to Gerard Connolly, certain parts of Lancashire had an average attendance as high as 70%. Rapid Irish immigration between 1820 and 1830, pushed the total baptised population of the northern region from 119 000 in 1814, to 190 000 in 1832, diluting and reducing overall levels of practice and provoking a crisis.<sup>328</sup> Irish immigration damaged the Catholic cause in England in the very area of its greatest strength, thereby threatening the credibility of Catholicism in Britain. Irregular practice threatened credibility just at the time when English Catholics were trying to prove themselves to be respectable, loyal and

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<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94

<sup>327</sup> W. Carleton, *op. cit.* p. 145ff.

<sup>328</sup> G. Connolly, *op. cit.* 1985, p. 210.



trustworthy citizens. The emphasis on non-attendance, however, can present a misleading picture. Failure to attend Mass did not signify an abandonment of religion, but rather a difference in emphasis on the essentials of belief. This difference represented a serious conflict of interests between Irish and English Catholics.

Lack of regular practice did not mean that the Irish lived in a religious vacuum; nor was it safe for them, in their uncertain world, to cut themselves off from the ministrations of their priests. Larkin's preoccupation with the Irish failure to conform to Tridentine demands, ignores the wide variety of elaborate popular practices which had in some cases survived from the pre-Christian era.

Popular folk religion in Ireland embraced many elements of magic and supernatural belief, which helped to interpret the peasant world and to protect against disaster. Belief in fairies is a good example of this. People took care to speak of the fairies respectfully. It was believed that certain types of bush were sacred to them, and that they lived on circular mounds or forts, which were left well alone by the people whatever the inconvenience.<sup>17</sup> It was often held that fairies had abducted a person, usually a small child, concealing the theft by replacing it with a fairy child or changeling, which would resemble the stolen mortal, but which would eventually sicken and die. This was obviously an attempt to explain high levels of infant mortality, but because of this belief, children suffering from unexplained illnesses were often very harshly treated in an effort to drive away the changeling and restore the real child.<sup>18</sup>

Humans were also believed to possess supernatural powers. For example, it was believed that a person skimming the dew from a field on the 1st May, would have the butter of the cows grazing in that field in their own churn, while the owner's milk would mysteriously fail to churn. Bad luck could be brought to an enemy, by secretly hanging a 'pishogue' - a bundle of sticks - on their land. Some people were believed to possess the evil eye, so that, wittingly or unwittingly, they brought bad luck on whatever they complimented. For this reason, it was customary for persons who praised a child or animal to ensure that no harm was done by adding, 'God save him!', or by spitting as they did so. Crofton Croker explained in 1824:

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<sup>17</sup> Belief in fairies is still common among older people of rural communities. The present writer's grandmother tells a story about being trapped in a familiar field as a child, unable to find the way out for two hours through fairie mischief. The same farmland in Ballyvicmaha, Co. Mayo, contained a fairie mound which was left well alone until the 1970s when it was ploughed, despite warnings of ill-luck to follow. The wrath of the fairies was blamed for the cattle afterwards becoming diseased.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the case of Bridget Cleary of Co. Tipperary who was burned to death in 1895 by a group of relatives and neighbours, which included her husband and father. Or the case in Tralee in 1826, of a woman indicted for drowning a four year old child while attempting 'to put the fairies out of it'.

'Few things are considered more dangerous or unfriendly or are longer remembered than the omission of such a ceremony.'<sup>19</sup>

With the celebration of patterns (patron saints' days) and wakes, traditional magic and Christian devotion were mixed. The pattern, a combination of ritual observance and riotous celebration, was one of the most prominent features of social life in pre-Famine Ireland. The pattern was the name given to certain gatherings which took place at sites believed to be of a sacred nature, most commonly a holy well. Visits to these sites took place on the festival of the saint to whom the well was dedicated, and to whom participants would offer their prayers and petitions. These devotions would be followed by drinking, dancing and feasting in the manner of a carnival or fair, and it was these festive elements at patterns and wakes, rather than their supernatural content, which caused the Church most concern.

The Catholic Church had a long history of opposition to such practices. Under a regulation introduced in 1782, for example, a priest could be suspended for celebrating a funeral Mass where drink was present, and people who took part in funeral games could be excommunicated. But continued ecclesiastical legislation throughout the nineteenth-century, indicates that these practices did not disappear easily. The ordinary local priest, however, often had a less critical attitude towards the customary practices of his congregation. In one Limerick parish during the early nineteenth century, the parish priest attended the lighting of the midsummer bonfire and led the people in prayer. In Longford, it was recalled in the 1950s, that in the past 'the priest was usually called in in cases of the butter being taken (by occult means) and that long ago, the clergy looked upon butter taking as a fact and not due to natural causes, such as a dirty churn, or something like that.'<sup>20</sup>

The fact that priests were drawn from the same community, and shared closely in the celebrations and misfortunes of their flocks, undoubtedly created a strong bond between clergy and people. As Kenneth Connolly noted, "The priests' power was the greater for their being drawn from the peasantry, sharing their prejudices."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, many contemporaries expressed concern at the low social origins of the Irish priesthood.<sup>22</sup> This was explained by the lack of incentive to priestly life offered by the low and uncertain income, but more usually it was blamed on the existence of a seminary in Maynooth. Before this college had

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in S. Connolly, 'Priests and People', p. 102

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in S. Connolly, 'Priests and People', p. 113

<sup>21</sup> K. Connell, *Irish Peasant Society: Four Historical Essays*, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1968), p. 86.

<sup>22</sup> See S. Connolly, 'Priests and People', p. 35

been opened in 1795, it was argued, the cost of an education on the Continent had ensured that the Catholic clergy had been persons of respectable backgrounds. This point can be over-emphasised, however, since the families of priests were generally middle class - 159 out of 205 parents of priests at Maynooth in 1808 were farmers - and priests themselves enjoyed a much higher income than the majority of their congregation, a fact which could often cause considerable resentment.<sup>23</sup> Despite this, however, Major Warburton explained in 1825 that the people preferred the Maynooth clergy:

"because they are generally more immediately acquainted with them, they go from amongst them and come back directly to them and therefore they know them better and as far as that goes I think that influences them."<sup>24</sup>

The priest can be seen as having three main roles in the community: defender/advocate; regulator/lawgiver; and holyman/healer. His position was enhanced by the absence of other social leaders, since the people were often alienated from their landlords and the middle classes. The priest often acted as an intermediary between the people and the authorities:

"If a poor man wants a favour asked of some great man, he gets the priest to ask that favour for him; if he is in distress he goes to the priest and looks upon him as his friend and protector."<sup>25</sup>

As Regulator, the priest possessed the ultimate weapon of excommunication. Therefore, although the people could stay away from Mass on occasion, they could not afford to cut themselves off from the priest. Evidence suggests that priests sometimes resorted to violence in order to discipline their flock. In Sligo in 1825, for example, a jury failed to reach a decision as to whether a priest had struck a man for failure to pay the Catholic rent. In Galway, in 1838, an enquiry was held into the death of a boy beaten to death by the priest after he was caught boxing in the street.<sup>26</sup> Carleton mentions more than once the use of violence by the clergy in order to prevent the laity from engaging in wild behavior. He tells the story of a bloody fight which showed no signs of abating:

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56 Quoting John Cahill, Crown Prosecutor, County Tipperary, giving evidence to S. C. on Crime, 1839.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58

"until we saw a pair of whips going hard and fast amongst them belonging to Fr. Corrigan and Fr. James, his curate. Well, its wonderful how soon a priest can clear up a quarrel! In five minutes there wasn't a hand up - instead they were ready to run into mice-holes."<sup>27</sup>

Connolly argues that the priest's ability to bring peace, even by such dubious means as above, made him a healer, but this part of his job-description could on occasion be more dramatically displayed. According to one priest who defected to the Church of Ireland, certain clergymen:

"arrogate to themselves the power of performing miracles and the generality of the people are fully impressed that the priests are possessed of that power."<sup>28</sup>

The Reverend David Croly in 1834, maintained that the populace believed the Catholic clergy could:

"at their will and pleasure make sick or make well, give prosperity or adversity, damnation or salvation."<sup>29</sup>

There are examples of healing powers being attributed to clay taken from the graves of certain priests. The great temperance reformer Theobald Mathew was believed to possess healing powers and this was confirmed on his visit to Liverpool by the experience of John Denvir, whose mother possessed the "strong Irish faith in the supernatural and in the power of God and His Church that can 'move mountains'." Denvir's younger brother was afflicted with a 'running in the foot which the doctors could not cure' and, therefore his determined mother followed the priest around the town until he finally laid his hands on the boy:

'She was a courageous woman with a great force of character and a third time she went to Fr. Mathew's gathering. This was in St Anthony's chapel yard and amongst the thousands there to hear him and to take the pledge, she waited her turn. Again she besought him to touch her boy's foot. He knew her again

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<sup>27</sup> W. Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, p. 68

<sup>28</sup> S. Connolly, *Priests and People*, p. 117

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117

and deeply moved by her importunity and great faith, he at length, to her great joy, put his hand on my brother's foot and gave him his blessing. My mother's faith in the power of God through His minister was rewarded, for the foot was healed."<sup>30</sup>

The supernatural powers believed to be at the disposal of the priesthood made them intimidating figures. To cross a priest was to risk suffering his curse. Fr. Corrigan, who was seen earlier, breaking up a quarrel with his whip, on the same occasion made use of some dreadful threats:

" I command you in the name of the Catholic Church and the Blessed Virgin Mary to stop this instant, if you don't wish me to turn you into stocks and stones where you stand and make world's wonders out of you, as long as you live - Doran, if you raise your hand once more I'll strike it dead on your body and to your mouth you'll never carry it while you have breath in your carcass.... Clear off you Flanigan's - you butchers you - or by St Dominic, I'll turn the heads round upon your bodies so that you'll not be able to look a quiet Christian in the eye again."<sup>31</sup>

The priest, therefore, had a central role in the community, but this is not to say that he was beyond reproach. Since the priest and people lived at such close quarters, his behavior was subject to close scrutiny. For the Church, the principal vices among the clergy were drink, women and avarice; the laity, however, were principally concerned with the latter. The seriousness of this problem can be seen by a statute of uniform tariff introduced by the Diocese of Dublin synod in 1831.<sup>32</sup> Larkin quotes the example from the parish of Kilcommen Erris, near Belmullet, County Mayo, who petitioned the Pope in 1840 to address the abuses which they suffered at the hands of their clergy. Indeed, many secret societies of the period, though sectarian in their membership, showed less prejudice in the selection of their victims, and in hard times unreasonable financial demands could lead to the targeting of priests.

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<sup>30</sup> J. Denvir, *The Life Story of an Old Rebel*, 1972, p. 13ff

<sup>31</sup> W. Carleton, *op. cit.* 'Larry McFarland's Wake', p. 68

<sup>32</sup> E. Larkin, *op. cit.* p. 632

Violence may have been the exception but irreverence was quite common. Several of the wake games played by the younger members of the community demonstrate this point. One game, for example, involved a person dressed as a priest, wearing a rosary of small potatoes, who entered into a conflict with the borekeen - the person in charge of the games - and was expelled from the room. Another game satirised the Sacrament of Marriage.<sup>33</sup>

The lack of discipline and respect for authority which characterised Irish Catholicism in the early nineteenth-century, can be attributed to a long period of restrictive legislation and intermittent persecution in the eighteenth-century, which resulted in an incomplete introduction into Ireland of the new standards and practices of the Counter-Reformation. The climate of the eighteenth century posed obvious problems to efficient administration, and the Irish hierarchy had no wish to increase their problems by imposing an unpopular level of discipline on their clergy. Even if the hierarchy had been zealously authoritarian in this period, they would have been faced with the problem of poor communications with many of the more isolated parts of the country. These obstacles were even greater when it came to the Vatican supervising the Bishops. As Connolly has said 'the Irish Church can be seen as one more triumph of the local over the central'.<sup>34</sup> The appointment of parish priests is a case in point. These appointments were theoretically in the hands of the Bishops, but regular concessions were made to local interests and not just the interests of wealthy families. As Richard Lalor Sheil said in 1825:

'The Catholic hierarchy, though absolute in name, are greatly under the influence of public opinion; they generally select the individual whom the parishioners wish to nominate.'<sup>35</sup>

There were indeed many occasions throughout the country on which local clergymen, with the support of their parishioners, defied the authority of the bishop. At Aughnamullen East, in County Monaghan, for example, the curate, Edward O'Callaghan, was suspended in 1835 but remained in the parish, performing his priestly duties, under the protection of an armed

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<sup>33</sup> "A bouchal puts an ould dark coat on him and if he can borry a wig from any of the ould men in the wakehouse, why, well and good, he is the liker his work - this is the priest. He takes and drives all of the men out of the house and shuts the door upon them so that they cannot get in until he lets them. He then ranges the girls all beside one another and going to the first makes her name him she wishes to be her husband: this she does of coorse and the priest lugs him in, shutting the door upon the rest. He then pronounces this marriage sarvice, when her husband smacks her first and then the priest - "Amo amas avourneen - in nomine gomine, betwux and between - for hoc erat in votis, squeeze 'em and please 'em - omnia vincit amor wid two horns to caput nap it - poluphlasboio the lasses - 'Quid'says Cleopatra, 'Shid' says Anthony, ragibus et clatibus solemnus stapere windows - nine months, big bottle and a honeymoon - Alneas poque Dido poque Rorymachree - hum non fiem vidat, lag, rag merry kerry Parawig and breeches, hoc manifestibus omnium - kiss your wife under the nose then seek repose. 'Tis done' says the priest, 'Vinculum trinculum and now you're married. Amen!'" W. Carleton, *op. cit.*, p.109.

<sup>34</sup> S. Connolly, *op. cit.*, p. 61

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62



bodyguard, provided by his local supporters and forcibly excluding from the chapel the replacement appointed by the bishop. In Beach, County Galway, in 1816, the congregation supported the man nominated by the Clanricarde family, whose claim to be present was denied by the Bishop, and the parish remained in rebellion for five years despite having been placed under an interdict.<sup>36</sup> Carleton also gives testimony to such behavior in the voice of Father Molloy in the story 'The Party Fight and Funeral':

'I have little cooperation in my efforts to communicate knowledge to my flock and implant better feelings among them. You must know that I am no great favourite with them. On being appointed to this parish by my bishop, I found the young man who was curate to my predecessor had formed a party against me thinking by that means eventually to get the parish himself. Accordingly on coming here I found the chapel doors closed on me so that a single individual amongst them would not recognise me as their proper pastor.'<sup>37</sup>

As a result of isolation and limited involvement in the development of the Catholic faith outside Ireland, therefore, the Irish evolved an idiosyncratic Catholicism and a degree of local autonomy which they were reluctant to relinquish. This manifested itself within the Church in Britain, in what Sheridan Gilley has called 'the ethnocentric element in Irish religion', that is, the demand for Irish-style priests and a lack of respect for central authority.<sup>38</sup>

One of the justifications for introducing Irish priests to the English missions, of which the Church seemed to take notice, was the difficulty of communication. Earnshaw speaks of a remark in the noticebook of St Mary's Church, Bradford, commenting on the 'need for a priest to speak the language of the Celt, to hear the confessions of the Faithful who have no English'. The Rev. Fr. Kelly of Keighley, we are told, 'will hear the Irish confessions tomorrow at ten o'clock' - this was in 1860.<sup>39</sup> The Irish language experienced a rapid decline in the nineteenth century; by 1851, only 10 % were unable to speak English. These figures tend, however, to misrepresent the situation. Simply because the majority of the people were able to speak English does not mean that they chose to do so. Many of those

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63

<sup>37</sup> W. Carleton, *op. cit.* p. 233

<sup>38</sup> S. Gilley, 'The Roman Catholic Mission to the Irish in London', *Recusant History*, Vol 10, 3, 1969.

<sup>39</sup> J. Earnshaw, *Records and Reminiscences of St Patrick's Parish*, 1908, p. 45

returned as being capable of speaking both Irish and English, would have been more at home in the former than the latter. In Clonmore, County Louth in 1814, it was said, "most of the inhabitants speak English but they prefer the Irish among themselves". In the neighbourhood of Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary, English was universally understood but spoken only when necessary and with evident reluctance.<sup>40</sup> The evidence suggests that the Irish in Britain used their native language frequently (often to the annoyance of the authorities) as John Denvir describes in Liverpool:

"I had an aunt, my mother's sister, married to a good patriotic Irishman, Hugh, or as he was more generally called Hughey, Roney, who kept a public house in Crosbie Street... Nearly all in Crosbie Street were from the West of Ireland and amongst them there was scarcely anything but Irish spoken .... My Aunt Nancy could speak the Northern Irish fluently and in the course of her business, acquired the Connaught Irish and accent."<sup>41</sup>

It is highly unlikely that Irish migrants in Bradford in the 1860s had 'no English' and, therefore, it seems clear that they preferred to approach the Sacraments in their own language, rather than in the English which they associated with Protestantism.<sup>42</sup> This desire to maintain the native language is of great importance as an indication of the existence of a feeling of identity among Irish immigrants. It made the Irish more inward-looking and more alien and threatening in appearance to outsiders. Thus the Irish language reinforced identity from within and without.

An examination of church records from the northern region of England suggests that the Irish pursued 'the ethnocentric element in religion' with some aggression. At St Patrick's Church in Liverpool in 1826, for example, the Irish who had managed to gain control of the building committee, attempted to make a bargain with their Bishop:

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<sup>40</sup> S. Connolly, 'Priests and People' p. 79

<sup>41</sup> J. Denvir, 'Life Story,' p. 15

<sup>42</sup> The experience of the infamous Protestant Evangelical, Caesar Otway illustrates this. Travelling near Glengariff in 1827, he met a gamekeeper whom he proceeded to question about the meaning of the Easter celebrations. The man was unable to provide him with satisfactory answers, which Otway found 'deplorable'. When Otway's companion asked the same questions in Irish, however, the effect was transforming and the man 'brightened up in countenance'. When asked 'what is Good Friday' the man replied "It was on that day that the Lord of mercy gave His life for sinners; a hundred thousand blessings on him for that" "What is Watch Saturday?" "It was the day when the watch was kept over the holy tomb that held the incorruptible body of my Sweet Saviour." Thus the man gave in Irish, clear and feeling answers to questions concerning which, when addressed in English, he appeared quite ignorant and yet of common English words and phrases he had the use; but like most of his countrymen in the South, his mind was groping in foreign parts when conversing in English and he only seemed to think in Irish; the one was the language of his commerce, the other of his heart.' *Sketches in Ireland, descriptive of interesting and hitherto unnoticed districts*, London, 1827.

St Patrick's Chapel is soon to be opened in the presence of Dr Doyle, who has consented to preach a sermon to recruit its funds. The latest information respecting the plans of the individuals who have now acquired the management of it, reports that a deputation is to wait upon me with the key, which is to be made over to Your Lordship, on condition of an Irish incumbent being appointed. Should the terms be rejected a rupture will be the consequence. The same report also intimates that the first chaplain may be English provided that he has an Irish colleague. Under these circumstances, I hope that Your Lordship will be able to spare Mr Walker, his assistant might be Mr Kelly?"<sup>43</sup>

These 'intensive broils' over the control of the chapel were not easily settled and caused the grand opening to be seriously delayed.

With the expanding number of Catholics in Britain and the need for intensive missionary work, the English Church was forced to rely heavily on priests drafted in from Ireland. The Bishops, however, were not willing to accede readily to the demands of their Irish flock. Many of the English clergy and laity were subject to the same prejudice that blinded society in general. Indeed, in some areas, popular prejudice was put forward as a good reason for ignoring the requests of the Irish:

"The Scotch people are animated by a strong heredity hatred of Catholicity, nor is the country favourable to Irish settlers simply as such.... If now the Catholic Church should receive an Irish organisation and is presented before the people of this country in their doubly prejudiced state, its claim certainly will not receive even the courtesy of a momentary attention."<sup>44</sup>

Irish priests were believed to come from an inferior social background and to be especially weak and vulnerable to temptation. The behavior of the Reverend McQuade, at Kippax

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<sup>43</sup> L.D.A. No.222, Dr Penswick to Dr Smith, Sept 1826

<sup>44</sup> J. McCaffrey, 'Roman Catholics in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol XXI, Part 3, 1983, p. 283

Park in Castleford, appeared to cause little surprise, for in effect he was confirming the stereotype:

"To me he appeared either absolutely mad or something much worse than mad on Friday night, after receiving intimation that he must go to Durham (the Bishop's residence) previously to his repairing to his new berth. He swore and raved like a fury, after I returned upstairs, and told his housekeeper and his nephew that he would make a fool of the Bishop, with much more scandalous language, to the like effect, which I heard distinctly and to my no small amazement and disedification. I think it could not be owing to anything he had taken that evening, though the night before, I am sorry to say, he had been perfectly drunk. I mentioned these circumstances on Saturday evening to Mr Chew at Hazlewood but he seemed to think great allowance must be made for Irishmen."<sup>45</sup>

Cardinals Griffiths and Wiseman were both alleged to be anti-Irish, to be reluctant to appoint Irish priests and to be responsible for the dismissal of clergymen considered to be too popular with their congregations.<sup>46</sup> The Catholic Church in England, at this time, was at pains to prove its loyalty to the Crown and was, therefore, very concerned that its clergy remain aloof from the nationalist politics associated with the Irish. Nationalism, as Fitzpatrick has noted, was also a useful foil for socialism and as such was doubly dangerous.<sup>47</sup> Members of suspicious Irish organisations, such as the Knights of St Patrick and the Ancient Order of Hibernians were, therefore, barred from the Sacraments unless they subjected their oaths to close scrutiny and relinquished all communication with members in Ireland. Irish priests were valued for their role in monitoring secret societies, as they were seen as having inside knowledge of the Irish community. As far as more legitimate movements like O'Connell's Repeal Association were concerned, however, Irish priests were less trustworthy and there were several instances of clergy being suspended for their political views.<sup>48</sup> The connection between politics and identity has been discussed

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<sup>45</sup> *L. D. A. No. 301*, Rev.J.Bell to Rev.B.Rayment, April 1828.

<sup>46</sup> S. Gilley, 'The Roman Catholic Mission to the Irish in London, 1840-1860', *Recusant History*, Vol 10, 3 1969, p.141

<sup>47</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, 'A Curious Middle Place, The Irish in Britain 1871-1921', in Swift & Gilley, *The Irish in Britain*, 1989, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> J. McCaffrey, 'Roman Catholics in Scotland', p. 280

elsewhere, but it is necessary at this point to reiterate the association of Catholicism and nationality, which was strengthened by the aversion of English Catholics to Irish migrants.

The great fear of the English hierarchy was the development of self-regulating Irish parishes, which would be united in a common desire to promote Irish interests and where the authority of the Bishop did not reach. The reticence of the Church in Britain towards the Irish, caused resentment and hardened attitudes. An Irish priest based in Bradford, for example, visited Manchester on a begging tour and 'in consequence of unfavourable reports of his character' was received rather 'coolly' by an English parish priest:

'The Irish consider this an indignity offered to their country and a violent prejudice is raised against me in this town. If Mr Rayment isn't more cautious in allowing such people, my endeavours to keep quietness may be of no use.'<sup>49</sup>

There are several warnings against the use of Irish priests, to be found in the correspondence of Bishop John Briggs of the Northern Region. In 1838, Dr Carruthers, the Bishop of Edinburgh, wrote to Briggs warning him of a priest who had applied for a mission in his region:

'His disposition is to be too familiar with the people and in an Irish congregation particularly this is attended with much danger.'<sup>50</sup>

Bishop Brown of Liverpool wrote to Briggs in 1841, thanking him for sending a new priest for the missions and stating:

'I am at present in very poor straits and what adds to my difficulties is that it is not considered prudent to place more Irish priests among the people at present. This I only whisper to Your Lordship, for the country would be in a blaze if it were known that these are my sentiments.'<sup>51</sup>

Members of the clergy were also concerned about being placed with Irish priests:

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<sup>49</sup> L. D. A. No. 155. Rev. J. Ashurst to Bishop Smith, Sept 1823.

<sup>50</sup> L. D. A. No. 326. Dr Carruthers to Dr Briggs, Feb 1838.

<sup>51</sup> L. D. A. No. 983. Dr Brown to Dr Briggs. Nov. 1840.

'I have been much amuch with Mr Brown. On Wednesday I had a most gloomy letter from him. He had heard or dreamt that an Irish priest was ordered by Your Lordship to Garstang; the consequence of this must be that this Irishman and MacHugh would combine against him, he would be situated between two fires and he ended with begging me to write to Your Lordship and expose the inconveniences.'<sup>52</sup>

Despite the caution suggested above, however, the hierarchy did not always manage to 'keep quietness'. The defiance of Irish parishioners was seen most dramatically on the occasions when a popular priest was removed from them. On occasions like this, it is possible to see Irish and English Catholics operating as two distinct parties with the Irish asserting themselves as a group in defence of their collective interests. One interesting example of this took place in Hull and concerned not an Irish priest but one whom, according to the Irish in the parish had 'faithfully done his duty to us'.<sup>53</sup>

The first vague complaints we hear about the Rev. John Smith suggest that, from his 'having wantonly sported and attacked private characters of his flock, many consider him unsafe in the confessional'.<sup>54</sup> The person making these allegations to the Bishop, a Mr Henry Astthrop, later went before the Mayor, declaring that he had received death threats from the Irish in the congregation, who did not want to see Smith removed. The Irish were alarmed at these allegations and wrote to the Bishop asking for his help in quelling the rumours, which now suggested that the Irish were planning to murder the entire English portion of the parish. They explained:

'Such a report uncontradicted, Your Lordship must be aware, will have a tendency to increase those prejudices unfortunately so prevalent against us.'<sup>55</sup>

When Astthrop called his witness before the Mayor, however, Mr Charles Saul denied the death threats and stated that he had only said that he would not wonder if the Irish would do some great mischief if Mr Smith were removed. The complaints were dismissed, therefore, as 'not worth notice'. Mr Astthrop later appeared before the Mayor again, charged with an

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<sup>52</sup> L. D. A. No 176A, Dr Lingard to Dr Smith, June 1824.

<sup>53</sup> L. D. A. No 78, P. McGettrick to Dr Smith, undated (1830).

<sup>54</sup> L. D. A No 268, H. Astthrop to Dr Smith, Jan 1829.

<sup>55</sup> L. D. A. No 393, W. Riley to Dr Smith, Dec 1829.



assault against Mr Saul and would have been bound over to keep the peace, had not the magistrates prevailed upon Mr Saul to 'be content with a public apology and an acknowledgement that he (Mr Astthrop) was drunk at the time of the assault.'<sup>56</sup>

Here the matter might have ended, had not the Bishop decided to proceed with the removal of Mr Smith. The Bishop's reasons for this are unclear but there is a suggestion of fraud and unfair dealings with the title deeds of the chapel. It may also be instructive to note that one of Smith's most fervent Irish allies, Mr William Riley, is entered on a parish sheet of accounts, as having presented a bill for £21 for masonry work. Perhaps Smith upset the English members of his congregation by displaying favouritism in the distribution of contracts. Whether or not the Bishop had any specific reason to question the character of Smith, he probably thought it expedient to remove a man whose presence was splitting the parish into factions anyway. Though the Irish may have not gone so far as to issue death threats to prevent the removal of Smith, they were not afraid to threaten their Bishop:

'There are about three hundred Irish in the congregation. We assisted in the building of the chapel and will do so but if Mr. Smith is removed we will decline. If he is let remain with us we will do our endeavours to act and assist towards the expense of this chapel and likewise to the support of Mr. Smith, but we are fully determined not to support or contribute any expense that comes again this chapel because our idea is thus, that we cannot get a better and we cannot yet ascertain the reason that he is going to be removed but there are a few individuals in our chapel who would like to have another priest and if they like to have another and support him, we will support Mr. Smith as long as we have got one sixpence... Signed, Patrick McGettrick for the Irish at Hull'<sup>57</sup>

The Irish obviously believed that their financial outlay entitled them to a degree of control. The money they had contributed towards the cost of building a chapel and supporting a priest, entitled them, as they saw it, to a say in the organisation of the parish, as they stressed:

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<sup>56</sup> L. D. A. No 401, Rev Smith to Dr Smith, Jan 1830.

<sup>57</sup> L. D. A. No. 74, P. McGettrick to Dr Penswick, undated.

'...the Irish have always supported Mr Smith and given upwards of £40 to the chapel.'<sup>58</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of this case, is the solidarity of the Irish as a group. As a community, they were conscious of the prevalence of prejudice against them. Indeed, one of their letters to the Bishop suggested that Smith's unpopularity with certain sections of the parish was as a result of his charity towards the Irish poor.<sup>59</sup> In another letter to the Bishop, McGettrick denied party feeling but in the same sentence threatened, 'our number is not small, being two to one to the English part of the congregation.'<sup>60</sup> There is evidence that religion and ethnicity cut across class boundaries in this instance. One petition sent by the Hull congregation in favour of Mr Smith is signed by six names, including a Dr Hennessy. Furthermore, we are told that in another petition in his favour, organised by the Irish, 'one of them called Hugh Weldon, a tea-dealer, signed upwards of twenty names himself.'<sup>61</sup>

The Bishop proceeded with Smith's suspension, much to the outrage of the Irish faction, who did not stand idly by. When the Bishop arrived at the church to personally conduct the Sunday service, he was met with violent resistance. A group of Irishmen, led by one Daniel O'Neill, forcibly took the street door key of the chapel from the schoolmaster and refused entry to the Bishop and his party 'unless Mr Smith was permitted to perform the service. O'Neill swore several oaths and was even seen to 'hold up his fist to strike at the Bishop' but was prevented from striking the blow. The mob eventually disbanded upon the arrival of the constable Mr Fox, but the local newspaper reported that the disputes at the Chapel were not yet terminated, for 'no religious worship took place in the edifice on Sunday last.'<sup>62</sup>

The most scandalous dispute of this kind, however, was the removal of the colourful Rev. Daniel Hearne from St Patrick's Church, Manchester, in 1846. It is useful to examine both the rise and the fall of Hearne, since he represents all that the Irish expected of their priests and all that the English church most feared. Two biographical myths suggest immediately the heroic stature of the man. The date of his birth in County Waterford is uncertain but it was assumed that he was born in the portentous year of 1798.<sup>63</sup> In his physical appearance

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<sup>58</sup> *L. D. A. No. 393*, W. Riley to Dr Smith, Dec 1829.

<sup>59</sup> *L. D. A. No. 71*, E. Cox to Dr Penswick, Aug 1830.

<sup>60</sup> *L. D. A. No. 74*, P. McGettrick to Dr Penswick, undated.

<sup>61</sup> *L. D. A. No. 393*, W. Riley to Dr Smith, Dec 1829.

<sup>62</sup> *The Hull Advertiser and Exchange Gazette*, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1830.

<sup>63</sup> R. Bracken, *Irish-born Secular Priests in the Diocese of Salford*, (Neal Richardson, Manchester, 1984)

he bore a wonderful resemblance - a resemblance perfectly startling in countenance and physique - to the then living and parliamentary force Daniel O'Connell.<sup>64</sup> Hearne was educated at Maynooth and ordained there in 1824. He was recommended to Bishop Smith in the same year and described as possessing:

'every qualification necessary to constitute a useful and edifying missionary....He is pious, humble and zealous and possesses so much good sense that could he spend a month or two under the direction of any experienced clergyman, I have no doubt but that his Bishop would be highly pleased with the manner in which he would afterwards discharge his duty in the sacred ministry.'<sup>65</sup>

Even Bishops make mistakes! Mr Brown's nightmares of approaching Irishmen were to come true, when Hearne was appointed to Garstang in July 1824. He was moved to St Mary's, Manchester in November 1825, and when St Patrick's church was opened in 1832, he was appointed to run the mission. His appointment was not without controversy, however, since the local English clergy were very opposed to working with Irish missionaries. In fact, they had only accepted Hearne in a subordinate position because of their crushing workload and the request of their Bishop. His success in gaining control of St Patrick's, was due to the unsuitability of the other candidate, the Rev. Peter Kaye, a renowned ladies' man, who quarreled continually with his brother priests (allegedly over his unpaid wine bills), installed gold fittings in his house and regularly took part in hand to hand fighting at Protestant meetings.<sup>66</sup> The local clergy were also concerned about poor attendance at Mass and they needed a charismatic character like Hearne to do something about it.

Hearne began earning his reputation as a loose cannon from the moment of his appointment. One of his first actions was to organise a procession, in direct contravention of the law. He then began collecting for a church bell, also against the law. Then in a snub directed at the self-important English Catholics, he levied a hefty fine on anyone heard calling St Patrick's church a 'chapel'. To the Irish members of his congregation, he became something of a hero by his 'incessant labour for both their temporal and spiritual welfare'.

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<sup>64</sup> R. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men*, 1908, p. 175.

<sup>65</sup> *L. D. A. No. 167*, Dr Penswick to Dr Smith, May 1824.

<sup>66</sup> G. Connolly, 'Little Brother Be At Peace: The Priest as Holy Man in the Nineteenth Century Ghetto', in W. J. Shields (ed) *Studies in Church History*, 1982, Vol 19, p. 192

He communicated a great impulse to religion in Manchester by the establishment of guilds, schools and kindred institutions.<sup>67</sup>

By these means, before he was driven out of the parish, Hearne's mission could claim ten thousand practicing Catholics.<sup>68</sup> His popularity was increased by his very public acts of heroism, such as his success in preventing a petition against the Maynooth grant and his victory in a libel suit in 1840 against the anti-Catholic clergyman Hugh Stowell. At a meeting arranged for the purpose of petitioning parliament against issuing further grants of money to Maynooth College, Stowell 'made a gross attack on Catholicity and singled out Mr. Hearne as an illustration of the tyranny practiced by priests in the confessional.' Hearne, in response, demanded proof of the allegations, which was not forthcoming, and wrote a letter of denial to the Manchester Guardian. Stowell repeated his allegations through his solicitor and was promptly sued for slander by Hearne and found guilty 'under circumstances of the most humiliating description.'<sup>69</sup>

That Hearne represented the ideal Irish priest, is demonstrated by several actions in which he fulfills the triple role of protector, regulator and healer. Hearne performed many services for the Irish in his community, such as reading and writing letters, banking money, sending remittances and giving advice 'on anything from employment to pig husbandry and good manners'.<sup>70</sup> During the year 1832, a particularly violent outbreak of the cholera morbus swept through the ghetto, claiming hundreds of lives. Manchester had a well developed medical service which the priests encouraged the people to make use of, but the poor entertained a deep suspicion of the whole network of clinical care, which often prevented them from seeking help. This was the background to the public disorder which took place on 2nd September 1832. John Brogan, the baby son of an Irish weaver, was found to be suffering from the cholera infection and was moved to the nearby fever isolation wards, where he died. Before his burial, his grandfather, who had cared for the boy since the death of his parents, in an effort to see him once more, opened the coffin. To his horror, he found the boy had been decapitated, stones marking his head. In terror, he ran to his priest, Fr Hearne, who would not believe the tale and promised to speak to resident surgeon Daniel Lynch. To Hearne's amazement, Lynch confirmed the story and admitted that a medical student had sawn the child's head off and sold it for anatomical research. By this time the streets were in uproar and the grisly torso was being carried at the head of the crowd, who marched to attack the hospital.

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<sup>67</sup> J. Gillow, Biographical Dictionary of English Catholics, (Burns & Oates, London, 1921), p. 233

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>69</sup> R. Swindells, *op. cit.* p. 177

<sup>70</sup> G. Connolly, 'Transubstantiation of Myth', p. 101

Since the barracks were far away, Hearne arrived on the scene before the militia. The main body of rioters had already broken into the building and were destroying equipment, setting fire to nearby carriages and carrying out patients. The place was gutted within a short time and some inmates died. Amidst all the confusion, Hearne could gain no hearing and, therefore, with the aid of friends he made his way into the building and with great personal courage, he mounted a water barrel. Here, ducking to avoid the bricks and lighted faggots still being thrown, he harangued the crowd, with his arms outstretched, upbraiding their breach of the peace, promising to present their grievances before the authorities and pleading with them to return to their homes. Eventually, a calm settled on the rioters and they began to disperse, thus avoiding the inevitable bloodshed which would have accompanied the arrival of the militia.<sup>71</sup>

A second story shows Hearne as Regulator, in a manner reminiscent of the priests in Carleton's pages:

'Fr Hearne, by the way, was a character. He was very fond of the youngsters and for some cause I became a special favourite of his. One day, walking with him up Rochdale Road, my hand in his, a great crowd completely blocked the street. A fight was going on, a ring being kept as we could see by a number of broom staves appearing above the heads of the crowd. The good father quickly placed me in a doorway, telling me not to move until he returned and then sprang into the crowd, wielding a mahogany stick, which he let fall upon the shoulders of all indiscriminately. A thunderbolt could not have cleared the street quicker or more completely. No one attempted to retaliate.'<sup>72</sup>

Connolly has argued that Hearne's ability to bring peace in this way made him a healer and holyman. One of his first tasks as the father of Irishtown, was to heal the warring of the two rival gangs from Leitrim and Roscommon who had terrified locals with their street battles for two weeks. Hearne negotiated a settlement, acting both as mediator and guarantor of safe conduct at a meeting held in the Catholic schoolroom.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Connolly, Thesis, p. 402-402

<sup>72</sup> R. Swindells, *op. cit.*, p. 176

<sup>73</sup> G. Connolly, 'Little Brother Be At Peace, p. 199



Unfortunately for Hearne and his superiors, his similarity to Daniel O'Connell was not merely physical. He shared both O'Connell's addiction to politics and his jealousy for his own power. Hearne became the 'personification of the ideally pacifist character of the local Irish politics.'<sup>74</sup> He exercised this role most forcefully on behalf of the Loyal National Repeal Association's local branch. As missionaries were forbidden to involve themselves in politics at any level, Hearne stood aloof for some time. It soon became obvious, however, that deep divisions amongst the local Repealers, between moderates and militants, threatened to disrupt the community on a wider scale. Hearne, as their priest, felt obliged to fulfill a divine obligation, which overruled episcopal sanctions. He set about healing the discord, rooting out Ribbon influence and reconciling rich and poor, Protestant and Catholic members. As the Repeal cause gathered momentum during the 1840s, his involvement in political action grew and he became a celebrated orator on the platform of the Anti-Corn Law League. His name became identified with political campaigns against social injustice, familiar to readers of the Northern Star. His language in public became increasingly provocative, no longer preoccupied with peace, but now marked by thinly veiled threats of the alternative. By 1845, with the Famine looming in Ireland, he had taken to using the pulpit of St Patrick's to broadcast his message.

Hearne's behavior was beginning to divide the Catholic community and clergy. The tension between the clergy at St Patrick's was made worse by the fact that he was 'afflicted with vanity and was jealous of much attention being paid by his parishioners to either of his two curates.'<sup>75</sup> One of the curates, Fr. Hugh McCormick, was voted into the chair by a committee connected to the mission or the convent attached to it. Hearne was annoyed and had the motion rescinded. A stormy meeting took place between the two clergymen and at Mass the following day, McCormick took the opportunity as preacher to upbraid Hearne, the chief celebrant, for allowing his political ambitions to subvert his vocation. Hearne made no reply until the end of the Mass, when he used the sacred moment of the final blessing, to launch a tirade of abuse against his brother priests.

Hearne was then summoned to Liverpool by the Bishop, where he received a severe reprimand for his grave canonical offence. The matter might have blown over with the discharge of McCormick but Hearne 'had not recovered his self-possession and influenced perhaps by some differences he had with the Bishop on account of monies he claimed to have invested in the mission, he defied his Bishop to suspend him.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> J. Gillow, Biographical Dictionary, p. 233

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 233

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 234



His suspension was the signal for the outbreak of a ferocious storm, which saw armed gangs fighting on the streets. His Irish parishioners claimed that he was removed because 'he was an Irishman who raised himself to a position that was envied and coveted.' They claimed that the affections of an Irish congregation for their pastor were never respected in England whilst 'the whims and prejudices of an English congregation respecting an Irish priest were always adopted.' In addition, they argued that Mr. Hearne was persecuted because 'he had the courage to love his country and to advocate her interests, which were misunderstood and even if understood would never be respected.'<sup>77</sup>

The new incumbent was treated with disdain and public subscriptions were established to enable Hearne to appeal to Rome. In defiance of their Bishop, a public meeting was held in Hearne's honour at the Free Trades Hall on June 15th 1846. Here he was presented with a testimonial consisting of a green silk purse containing £270 in gold, a large gold crucifix and chain valued at £40 and a silver breakfast service.<sup>78</sup> The letters of Bishop Brown of Liverpool emphasise Hearne's 'very disreputable conduct and insolent language',

'I have never been treated so much *en garçon* in my life as I have been treated by Mr Hearne. Add to this he has lived habitually for several years past in sentiments of strong contempt of me and openly declared defiance of me.'

His letters repeat that Hearne must be made to realise that 'the English mission is differently regulated from Ireland'.<sup>79</sup>

Hearne was not alone in failing to understand this fact, and this represents the crux of the conflict between English and Irish Catholics. Undoubtedly, the Catholic Church in England was concerned about the lack of regular practice among immigrants but this was a symptom, rather than a cause of the real problem. The fundamental barrier was a difference in the development of native Catholicism in both countries, which was on the one hand populist, decentralised and demanding and on the other aristocratic, organised and obedient. It is a mistake to suggest that a lack of Irish observance can be equated with an absence of devotion, or a lack of interest in religion. Many of those who failed to contribute to the responses at Sunday Mass, were not lacking when it came to contributing to mission funds and the vital relationship between priest and people was not destroyed by non-attendance when the priest was as much part of the community as Father Hearne.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 234

<sup>78</sup> R. Swindells, *op. cit.* p. 176

<sup>79</sup> L. D. A. No. 176, Dr Brown to Dr Briggs, Dec 1845.

Perhaps if Irish Catholics had shown a complete lack of interest in their religion, they would have presented less of an immediate challenge to the English Church, which may then have risked leaving them to the devil. It was the attempts of the Irish to establish a rival form of Catholicism which worried the English Church so much and conditioned their response.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that Ireland's distance from the rest of European Catholicism led to the development of a form of religious practice which was at variance with the standard Tridentine discipline practiced in England. The incomplete introduction of the standards and practices of the counter-reformation in Ireland, ensured that English and Irish co-religionists had great difficulty in recognising each other. As a consequence of the poor infrastructure and limited manpower of the Church, Irish Catholics were forced back on their own resources, which led to the development of a vibrant folk religion. In addition, the administrative difficulties of the Church in Ireland meant that the hierarchy was limited in its ability to apply strict discipline among both clergy and laity. The Irish laity and their priests became used to a level of power and influence in their parishes which was not usual within the English Church and which they were reluctant to relinquish. Irish Catholics also had a particular idea of the role of the priest and what they expected from him. The brand of Catholicism they met with in the new communities undoubtedly appeared alien to them but they remained vocal in their demands for a form of religious practice with which they could be comfortable.

This conflict of interests between Irish and English Catholics over the organisation of the Church in England, provides graphic and telling examples of how the Irish asserted themselves as an ethnic group. This assertiveness contradicts the stereotype of the cringing, ignorant mass of Irish immigrants, manipulated and controlled by their evil priests. These examples reveal the Irish identifying with specifically Irish interests and acting as a group in order to promote their interests. The assertiveness of Irish immigrants and not just their lack of regular practice was a major cause for concern within the English church in this period. The hostile reaction of their co-religionists only served to reinforce Irish ethnic identity.

### **Conclusion**

My objective in producing this study was to consider the experience of Irish migrants in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the first half of the nineteenth century; to discover who they were, where they came from, to what extent their pre-migration experience was reflected in their lives in their new homes and whether or not they had an awareness of themselves as a community. The period under investigation has been understudied, owing to a lack of reliable documentary evidence. This has created a situation whereby the conclusions drawn from a later and better historically resourced period, have been projected backwards, with the result that the image of the wretched Famine migrant has prevailed in the pre-Famine period also. Despite a body of revisionist literature focusing on the 'pull' as well as the 'push' factors in migration, the image of the Irish migrant as at best a miserable victim is still predominant. Thus the combination of historical anachronism and lack of data has meant that not only have many questions not been answered about Irish migrants but they have not yet been asked.

With the use of records of transportation, this study has thrown light onto a period which has been clouded by a lack of historical evidence. The information collected in these documents was required to be particularly detailed and reliable. Thus evidence was collected on the age and family structure, literacy, religion, and occupations of those sentenced to transportation in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the period 1815-1845. This data was presented and analysed in the first section of this thesis.

One of the main claims made repeatedly by historians is that only a minority left Ireland with capital or economic skills. The evidence presented in Chapter One, however, provides a very different picture. The sample drawn from Irish convicts sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire shows a group of people skilled to a very similar degree as the sample drawn from among English convicts and to a much higher degree than those countrymen they left behind. This would support the statement of Ricardo in 1816, that 'the young, the strong, the enterprising and industrious families leave us whilst the indolent and indigent portion are left behind.' Many of these migrants were textile workers whose migration was a direct consequence of the decline of the textile industry in Ireland and their knowledge of better opportunities in England. In other words these people knew of a market for their skills where they had the opportunity to earn better wages.

In support of the occupational statistics, the figures on levels of literacy contrast with the traditional image of the Irish migrant. Irish convicts sentenced in Yorkshire and Lancashire

had a literacy rate much higher than those they left behind and the percentage of those who could read and write was actually higher than that of English convicts, (54.15% vis a vis 52.94%).

The Royal Commission has been used by historians and commentators, in the absence of other evidence, mostly as proof of Irish desperation and degradation, despite the fact that the evidence was drawn generally from hostile sources. There is however significant material in this document which presents the Irish in a more positive way and recognizes the fact that the Irish were represented in skilled professions, such as that taken from Samuel Holme, William Dillon and James Grant.

In a similar vein to Ricardo, Mokyr has referred to emigrants as 'the resourceful, the ingenious, the energetic, the ambitious, and the most sophisticated' members of the Irish workforce. In this thesis I have provided examples of these qualities. As well as the evidence from the records there is also qualitative evidence of ingenuity and aptitude. In the labour market, for example, where Irish migrants generally faced an uphill task, many developed economic coping strategies which demonstrate their resourcefulness. Many Irish immigrants took to hawking and peddling in order to make a living with the minimum capital outlay. Many were involved in the lower end of the retail trade and were seen to have a natural ability in this area. Irish success in this area was largely related to their ability to retain a competitive edge by minimising their overheads, for example, by occupying cheaper dwellings. The manufacture of poitin was a highly profitable trade in which participants traded in a very familiar market. The value of this business made the risks involved acceptable. Another tactic they used was to gain control of a corner of the market driving out competition by undercutting or simple muscle power, a practice O'Tuathaigh has labelled the 'Hibernian closed shop'. In these various ways Irish migrants were successfully responding to the conditions of the market and demonstrating a high level of flexibility and resourcefulness.

The self-awareness of the Irish as a community can be seen in two immediately obvious ways: firstly, the fact that the Irish appear to have preferred to live together and secondly, that they demonstrated a willingness to assist each other in time of need and to provide a point of welcome for new immigrants. It is testimony to the strength of prejudice against the Irish, that previously the focus of study has been on English anti-Irishness, rather than on Irish attitudes and pre-conceived opinions of the English. British anti-Irishness has been given more attention because of the relation of power between the two peoples and such attitudes do demand investigation because of the impact they had on the way the Irish were

able to live their lives. This study, however, has adopted the idea that identities are mutually constituting and therefore considers both together.

In Section Two, the question was asked how were the Irish seen and how did they see themselves? Both parties had a creative role in each other's identity. How the Irish were seen by their hosts was extremely important in the way in which they were able to interact and the extent to which they were pushed back into their own community. Equally important for these developments was the level of awareness the Irish had of themselves as a community and of their nation and its welfare.

In the foregoing the anti-Irish stereotype has been explained as a necessary part of colonial propaganda. The British established a reservoir of negative imagery and drew from it mildly scornful or venomous material, according to the prevalent social climate. They used the Irish as a tool in their own self-creation, transferring to them the qualities they denied in themselves and then castigating the Irish for possessing these qualities. Their similarities as peoples threw into question the whole colonial project in Ireland, making necessary the exaggeration of the differences which inevitably then came to polarise them. In addition to being outlandish, certain aspects of Irish culture, such as ritual fighting, drinking and wake-keeping, were also threatening in the context of the overcrowded and insanitary environment of the city. This period was a particularly difficult one in which to be Irish in Britain. Middle class concerns over political stability, public health and law and order combined with working class anxieties related to unemployment, underemployment and dislocation meant that Irish immigrants were targeted from all sides. All pretence at unity following the Act of Union in 1801 was exposed by distinctions made between the two nations in a series of important legislative reforms. So successful was colonial propaganda, that despite being technically the same people under the same government, the British were neither able nor willing to accept the Irish as kinsmen.

Irish identity was in turn heavily influenced by the English stereotype, being to a great extent a defensive reaction to English derogation. The Irish selected characteristics for emphasis according to those chosen by the English. One feature of Irish identity, for example, was a snobbishness in the face of English vulgarity and this was heightened by the religious difference. Emboldened by a guarantee of Salvation which was not extended to the Protestant English, the Irish had reason to feel self-satisfied and the related focus on loss and victimhood led them to emphasise further their moral superiority. The idea of the Irish as victims combined with the natural attachment of people to their own geographical area spawned the 'culture of exile' motif in Irish self-representation. Ireland was a concept



to which one could belong equally well when outside the political boundaries of the country. This enabled and encouraged the immigrants, when faced with a hostile reception in the new communities, to find courage and pride in their own sense of identity. Thus a decision to migrate based almost completely on pragmatic principles could be reinterpreted as a tragedy in which choice played no part, a process which in turn reinforced identity.

Irish history as a history of opposition and ancient antagonisms was a version transmitted through the native culture. The English colonisers had focused on the differences between the two peoples and the Irish followed suit. Their folksongs, history, legends, language, ritual and religion all fuelled feelings of hate, mistrust and opposition and clearly displayed a dissatisfaction with the status quo. In manifold minor ways and on a daily basis, the Irish attempted to subvert English rule. Chapter Three demonstrates that the Irish had developed ideas regarding the English and their relationship with them. This was crucial to the way they lived their lives in the new communities, that is, in choosing to live together in predominantly Irish areas, in their political allegiances and religious practices. English fear and loathing of the Irish, increased their solidarity, and pushed them further away. The feeling of threat on both sides encouraged ethnocentrism.

Section Three examined Irish identity in its everyday manifestations, that is, in politics, in religion and in secret societies. Chapter Four considered the question of politics in order to understand the extent to which identity affected the attitudes and behavior of Irish immigrants. Irish immigrants in the North of England remained very much influenced by the politics of their homeland and their leaders like Daniel O'Connell, who maintained a consistent following during his visits to areas with an Irish presence. Tory misrule in Ireland and the consequent alliance between O'Connell and the Whigs prompted the Irish community to lend their support to the Whig cause as demonstrated particularly by the Liverpool election of 1837. Irish involvement in the Chartist movement can also be explained as loyalty to Ireland, since the issue of Ireland was very much on the Chartist agenda and the Irish were targeted in a deliberate campaign by the Chartist leadership. Disagreement between O'Connell and O'Connor centred on the question of which of the two had Ireland's true interests at heart. The fact that many Irish opted for O'Connell suggests their loyalties lay with their native countrymen rather than with the people of their adopted home. The evidence presented shows that not only were the Irish in Britain enthusiastic supporters of the movement for the Repeal of the Act of Union but that they were driving it forward. Such efforts to promote remedial measures for their homeland, undoubtedly exacerbated the difficulty of visualising a common destiny with their British neighbours and

would suggest that many Irish immigrants were reluctant to accept their residence in Britain as permanent.

Chapter Five argues that the very existence of Ribbonism in Britain demonstrates the strength of ethnic identity among Irish immigrants and their alienation from the host society. The Ribbon Society promoted association primarily on the grounds of ethnicity, the only universally prevalent feature of the society being the restriction of membership to Roman Catholics. Ribbon Societies provided labour protection, tramping relief, and sickness and death benefits to members. Ribbon networks facilitated labour mobility through the payment of tramp relief which was made up of quarterly charges levied on each branch and distributed by the county delegate. Members travelling to England or America were supplied with certificates which entitled them to assistance from the receiving branch thus easing the process of migration. The system of tickets and tramp relief enabled members to remain within Irish networks and lessened the necessity to associate outside their own community and provides one of the best examples of the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Irish. The political outlook of the Ribbon Societies is also important in that it demonstrates the disillusionment and alienation from the British state of at least this proportion of the immigrant community.

Chapter Six shows that in terms of their religious practice, Irish Catholics were very much products of their background. They practiced their religion in Britain in the same way they had at home despite the irritation caused to their British co-religionists. As a result of the incomplete introduction of counter-reformation in Ireland, an idiosyncratic Catholicism with a high degree of local autonomy emerged which the Irish were reluctant to relinquish. This tradition was transferred to the new communities and can be seen in their demands for Irish priests and general lack of respect for central authority. The English hierarchy feared the development of self-regulating Irish parishes which would be united in a desire to promote Irish interests and where the authority of the bishops would not reach. Despite the low levels of formal practice, this study demonstrates that the Irish had very clear ideas about how their Church should be managed and were prepared to assert themselves for their beliefs. These conflicts of interests between the Irish and English Catholics over the organisation of the Church in England, provide graphic and telling examples of how the Irish asserted themselves as an ethnic group. They show the Irish identifying with specific Irish interests and operating as a group in order to promote their interests. In this way they became alienated from the one group in English society who might have been expected to be receptive to them. The hostile reaction of their co-religionists and of the host society in general only served to reinforce their ethnic identity.

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